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fantastic

OCTOBER 1958

Volume 7 Number 10

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Cover: GABE KEITH

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GOOD NEWS—

—John Wyndham's new series, "The Troons Of Space," starts in the Nov. issue. Series of four long novelettes about the Troon family, space adventurers. Great writing by s-f's currently top author . . . Bad news—S. J. Byrne had to stop work temporarily on "Man Of Two Worlds," his new novel for *Amazing*. Reason: Western movie he's doing under contract. The Hollywood moguls won't wait . . . Good news—Gabe Keith, our new artist has come up with some of the greatest covers we've ever seen. The fall and winter issues of *Fantastic* and *Amazing* will be real eye-poppers. This lad handles color like nobody we've ever seen . . . Bad news—G. L. Vandenberg, delivering script to *Fantastic*, left same on bus; not returned; no duplicate; now sweating out complete rewrite; moral: Always make carbon copy . . . Good news—Ellery Lanier, *Fantastic's* radio-personality fact editor is writing a book on magic. Announcement on Long John Nebel's top-drawer radio show brought flood of advance orders . . . Long John, spoofed Ellery over the air waves—told his audience that Ellery's latest photograph was on the cover of the July *Fantastic*; that was the "Footprints Of Satan" issue with Satan, complete with tail and cloven hooves, leaving red tracks in the snow . . . Bad news—Art Barron, *Amazing's* fact editor couldn't get his play, "The Judge," off the ground; headed for Broadway, it died way short; Art's looking for a new play; bet the next one makes it . . . Good news—The new Charles Eric Main novel "The Big Countdown," due in the December *Amazing* is a real thunderer. Don't dare miss it if you like science fiction at its very best.—PWF

"Drums throbbed...the naked voodoo Queen began her forbidden dance..."

Marie Laveau actually lived. It was said that crocodiles raised her and that she could turn herself into a dog. A fanatic cult of men and women worshipped her in pagan midnight revels that would have shamed Nero. It was whispered she had a bureau filled with the skeletons of babies.

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ACCORDING TO YOU...

Dear Editor:

I'm very excited about the new policy of fantasy-weird tales in *Fantastic*. Although the level of your stories tends to the juvenile, *Fantastic* will be one of my immediate purchases whenever it hits the newsstands. Since the demise of *Weird Tales* and *Beyond Fantasy Fiction* there has been a gaping hole in the s-f publishing field.

It is my opinion that quite a few writers prefer to write fantasy as opposed to science fiction, for their own enjoyment and entertainment. It has been proved in the past that there is little market for a fantasy magazine, but I feel that the combination of the fantasy and the weird under one cover will definitely have a steady market.

Evidently you are going to have a poll on whether to have s-f or the present format. Please count this as a vote for keeping and developing the present format and policy.

Bill Beard
5000 W. Silver Spring Dr.
Milwaukee 18, Wisconsin

● *The enthusiasm with which the reshaping of Fantastic has been received, warms our heart! You've summed up just about what we've aimed at and after a few jittery weeks—the time it took to get the first reports on reader-reaction—we've been very happy about the change. Now we're waiting for the returns from the quiz on page 125. Please fill it out and mail it!*

Dear Editor:

Hermann J. Muller, the world famous Nobel Prize geneticist and a science fiction fan since the appearance of H. G. Wells' "First Men in the Moon," complained in the November 6, 1957, issue of *The Humanist* that a great deal of antisience is rearing its ugly head in that branch of literature loosely described as science fiction. Dr. Muller also noted that "this lapse . . . is representative of the current recrudescence of old-time theology and of animistic superstition in general, with all their associated spiritistic and mystical beliefs" and that "to attach the appellation 'science fiction' to fables that merely represent outgrowths of the ancient dualistic superstitions of all primitive men is a flagrant reversal of the meaning of words . . ." Dr. Muller, in short, is urging that all that is to be labelled "science fiction" be kept scientific.

An interesting and almost classical example of this antiscientific trend is James Blish's current novel "A Case of Conscience" (Bal-

(Continued on page 126)

For years, the danger of atomic waste had been feared, discussed, pondered. But now, it was too late for words and Mankind was faced with the final result of incredible folly—a short life in a—

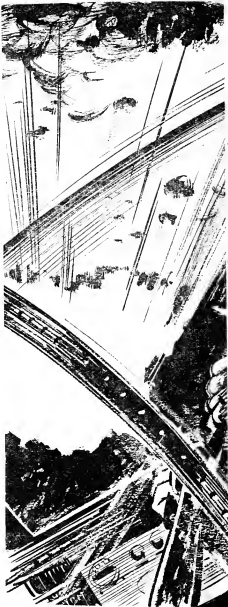
SUICIDE WORLD

By HARLAN ELLISON

ILLUSTRATOR LLEWELLYN

NICK BONHAM lit a fresh cigarette from the dying roach of his last one, and took the Beechcraft even lower over the raging maw of the new volcano mankind had labeled Beelzebub. He had never been religious, but at the brink of this inferno he found himself turning to God for help; everyone else had failed.

Beneath the wheeling plane, stretching to the shore of Lake Erie, a charred, cinder-buried plain rolled — where, three days before, had been the city of Cleveland. Now, only destruction and remnants were to be glimpsed through



Below them lay



the white-hot remains of a city.

the banks of black smoke rolling up from the cone of Beelzebub. Bonham bit his full lower lip with straight, white teeth. A fine film of soot covered his face; he blinked twice, rapidly as the Beechcraft heeled in the convection currents set up from the heat below and he fought the controls for an instant.

Beside him, the slim auburn-haired girl threw an anxious glance first at her companion, then at the spawning giant below. "It's growing, Nick," she said.

"Um," he conceded worriedly. "Nothing I can do."

"I know," she answered, softly, as though it had all been said with that phrase.

Cleveland was dead. The few thousands who had been fortunate enough to escape along the Lakefront Highway and out Euclid Avenue to the East would never be able to find their loved ones now. Everything was gone. Only the lake of lava remained—pulsing, bubbling, snorting over a two mile area. Three days ago, this had been one of the largest cities in the United States. Now, it was desolation and death.

"Try to get Stelmack, will you, Betty," Bonham directed the dark-eyed girl. He tapped

the radio set with a dirty hand.

She leaned forward and flicked the communicator switch: "Sparrow Three to Nest. Sparrow Three to Nest," she spoke into the mike earnestly. "Come in Nest. Come in—"

The high frequency hum of the receiver was broken by the sudden blurt of a voice responding. "Nest to Sparrow Three; Nest to Sparrow Three. Come on in, Nick. What's it like out there?"

Nick Bonham snapped his fingers at the girl, indicating he wanted the hand-mike. She drew it loose from its clamp and handed it across. He blew once into the grille and thumbed down the control. "It's much bigger, Jay. Looks as though it slopes off into Erie. Can't tell whether it's one neck, or several, merging a bit below the ground."

He clicked the control again and the strained voice of Jay Stelmack came in through the receiver. "Are there any signs of cracking along the dome or neck?"

"It looks as though the Southwest quadrant of the cone is splitting. We can expect another lava flow down—that way almost any hour now. Any advice? Over."

"No, I don't think so, Nick.

You're there . . . if *you* can't think of anything, there's nothing *I* could suggest. Over."

Bonham pressed the hand-mike to his chest and his eyes closed for a second as the Beechcraft dipped. He opened his eyes, and stared down at the curling, rope-thick pillars of black soot and smoke pouring up at the plane from below. "What do you get from the other stations, Jay?"

Stelmack's voice came metallically. "I hear Salt Lake City is in a bad way. They've called theirs Blackmouth. It swept the Mormon Temple away over an hour ago.

"Los Angeles has a religious riot on its hands, though the nearest volcano is near La Brea. The Governor has sent out the National Guard. Milwaukee and Chicago both have water problems. The situation isn't much better in Dallas or Memphis or New York or—"

His voice went on solidly, telling a tale of death and destruction across the face of the nation. And Bonham knew it was the same everywhere. It was the same all over the world.

They had done their best to poison the Earth, and having succeeded, were aghast at their handiwork. He only half-

listened to Jay Stelmack's reports; as he wheeled above the Cleveland volcano, his thoughts spun backward, back to the days before the first cone appeared where quiet land had been. To the days when he worked for Research Unlimited . . .

The picture had taken shape unhappily. The first ten reports that came through from the field men—reports on firms like Cobalt Enterprises, Herrod Chemicals, Moore & Sevens, Incorporated and even the government subsidized Oleph-Jameson Company—all of them indicated the same thing: waste.

Nick Bonham lit a cigarette from the still-smoldering roach of his last, and leaned back in the comfortable contour chair. He blew a fine trail of smoke at the ceiling, and looked across at his partner, Jay Stelmack.

"No question about it, Jay. They've all been doing the same thing. The only one who's innocent as far as our research has taken us is Markheim, and he's been sealing his waste in cannisters, and dumping them at sea."

Jay Stelmack was a small man; small of face and body, with worried, quick movements that were accented by

his fine bone structure, and thinning hair. His face was adolescent-looking, pixie-ish, with almost invisible eyebrows, and a nose too aquiline to make him appealing to women. But he was a cracker-jack research chemist, a specialist in atomic wastes.

"Nick, now is the time for us to peddle our wares." He was intent, and his words carried great meaning to the taller, craggy-featured Bonham. Nick nodded silently, pursing his lips around the cigarette.

"Okay, Jay, whatever you think. But I'd feel a little easier if I had more field studies to rely upon. We haven't checked out the Gulf Coast firms yet, and there're still half a dozen reports to be catalogued from New England and the Midwest."

Stelmack bent forward in his chair. He thumbed aside the sheaf of reports on the desk separating them, and lifted a tally sheet that had been half-buried.

"Nick, what does this tally say?"

Bonham spread his hands with finality. "Right, right. Sure it says what we've suspected all along; sure it vindicates your faith in Research Unlimited, Jay, but we're going to be coming up against some pretty hard-headed busi-

nessmen and politicians; we've *got* to have all the facts."

Stelmack slapped the paper down, his palm covering it. "Too much longer may be too late, Nick, and you know it."

Bonham tightened his full lips again, and nodded once more. His voice had a fading edge of weariness in it, as though resignation lived in the tones. "I—know—Jay."

Stelmack sighed deeply and leaned back. "Oh hell, what's the use, Nick. They won't listen, and you know it."

"They've *got* to listen, Jay!"

Stelmack looked tired. "I've been trying to get them to listen for eight years now, Nick. I'd lost all my hope when I met you. But has anything changed, really? They're even worse now than eight years ago, if anything."

Bonham leaned forward. "Jay, you've got to hang on to what we've got now. You've got to maintain—well, damn it, your *faith*, if nothing else."

Jay Stelmack's face was worn. His eyes blinked rapidly. "Eight years can do a lot to a man. I lost Nora and the boy, and my job with Markheim, and then there was that item in *Time*, and I was finished in the trade. It does a lot

to you, Nick. No money for so long, struggling just to stay alive to experiment . . . a long time, Nick . . . a lot of things happen . . ."

Bonham interrupted. "Nora took the boy because she had no faith in you, Jay. I have. I believe in you, and soon enough everyone else will realize what a wonderful job you've been doing."

Stelmack pushed himself free of the chair, stood up with a sigh. "I suppose you're right, Nick. I suppose you're right." His shoulders sagged. "I'm a little beat now. I think I'll go down and take a nap." He started for the door.

"I'll speak to you later, Jay," Bonham said softly. "You try and rest. Perhaps those Gulf Coast reports will be in by the time you wake up."

"Sure . . . sure . . ." Stelmack did not even turn around. He closed the door behind himself very quietly.

Bonham stared after him, as though the little man had been the sun that had just sunk into the sea. He wished he had not let the chemist go; there had been a night not too long ago when Jay had taken a razor blade from the medicine cabinet—

He shook his head roughly, pressing the memory flat, not

allowing it to grow and fog his faith. He had known Jay Stelmack for eight years, and together—using Nick's money, the last of the dole his grandfather had left him—they had pursued the spectre of the waste; and what Jay Stelmack had told Nick Bonham was the truth.

Nick drew deeply on his cigarette. He had known Jay Stelmack for eight years, and during that time they had grown closer than brothers, living together in the big brownstone house on West 93rd Street; living with the certain knowledge that if their researches were scoffed at, the world would probably die.

He lifted the sheaf of records and thumbed them quickly.

All but Markheim. How strange, that the largest atomic projects corporation in America was not subject to the sin of all other competitors. How strange.

He lifted out the Markheim file again, and read the red-circled sections carefully. The ash grew longer on his cigarette, but he did not notice.

How strange.

He flicked the intercom on the desk, and said, "Betty, what have I got on for this afternoon?"

"You have a field agent

from Dallas named Bleeker at four, Nick. And someone from the Community Chest at five. That's all."

"Cancel them. Have Brad send the Merc around front. I'm going out to see Markheim."

"Yes, Nick." The intercom clicked off.

Nick Bonham sat back, and let his thoughts untangle. Eight years ago, after he had come into his own fortune, he had met Jay Stelmack, and taken an interest in the man's ideas. He had found that Stelmack had at one time been a respected research chemist, working for Markheim Chemical Company, but had lost everything and somehow acquired a reputation as a crackpot because of his fixation on atomic waste. But he hadn't been mad—he'd been right.

That had been eight years before and no one had paid any attention. Now the experts had tracked back on Jay Stelmack's theories but they'd been a little late. One way or the other, it was all going to end now. Because Stelmack's charts and calculations said the End was coming within a few months. Steps would be taken—if such steps could have any effect, so late in the matter—or they would be ig-

nored. Either way, they would have done all they could.

And Nick Bonham wondered if it was worth the time and effort . . . saving the Earth.

He didn't much *feel* like a saviour. And he knew he didn't look like one. He shoved away from the desk; he had to see Markheim now. That was so strange.

He sliced off his worries and his thoughts, and took an extra pack of cigarettes from the desk; it might be a longer trip than he thought, over to Markheim's plant and back. He might have to spend the night in a motel on the road. He took a second pack, and slipped it into his jacket pocket.

Betty Seiwert was on the phone as he passed through the reception room, and he paused long enough for her to finish her conversation. She was trying to hurry.

"Yes, Mr. Teibaum, I'll certainly tell him. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. As soon as he comes in, sir. I realize how important it is, sir. Yes, sir, to be sure; you can count on it sir. Yes, sir, thank you. Goodbye."

Nick arched an eyebrow in inquiry, and Betty made an eloquent gesture of frustration. "Quack. Says he has been

studying our problem, and knows the answer."

Nick smiled. "Well? Give, what is the solution?"

Betty returned the smile, then her face became demure, and she retorted, "According to Mr. Teibaum, it's bicarbonate of soda. In large amounts."

"Uh-huh," Bonham agreed. "Sure it is. And I'm the Prince of Shebang, too." He started toward the door as the sound of the Mercury pulling up filled the street.

She stopped him with, "Will you be home for dinner, Nick?"

He tossed over his shoulder, one hand on the doorknob, "I don't think so, Betty. Don't count on it. And, oh yeah, if anybody calls, I'm in a conference with . . . oh hell, just fake a name . . . and I won't be available till tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay . . . boss," she added the last word with humor, but a warmth glowed in her eyes, and her face was not at all businesslike.

He winked broadly and stepped outside.

The man in jeans and sport shirt slid out from behind the wheel, and allowed Bonham to take the seat. "Anything you want done, Mr. Bonham?"

The craggy-faced head of

Research Unlimited rubbed the side of his face in thought, and then pursed his lips in a negative expression. "No, I can't think of anything, Brad. Except perhaps you might take a run out to the field and make sure the Beechcraft is fueled and clean; I might want to make a run tomorrow or the next day. Okay?"

The man in jeans made a circle of thumb and forefinger. Nick Bonham turned the key in the ignition and gunned the motor. "You be back for dinner, boss?" Brad asked a little warily.

Bonham looked over and repeated the same answer he had given his secretary. "Doesn't look likely, Brad. Any reason why I should?"

The chauffeur quickly shook his head. "Oh, no sir, it was just, well—uh—I got this date tonight and—uh—"

"How much, Brad?" With a quick smile.

"A twenty would do it, Mr. Bonham."

The head of Research Unlimited peeled off a pair of tens from a sheaf in his wallet, slid them over to the other man. "So the least you could do would be to take the top down on this damned car," Bonham joshed him. For an instant Brad looked thunderstruck at his failure to antic-

ipate Bonham's wishes, and then grinned back.

"For twenty, the best I can do is oil the door hinges, Mr. Bonham."

Nick Bonham laughed quickly, threw the car into drive and tooled away from the curb.

It was a long drive. When it was apparent no rain was imminent, he lowered the top; on the Parkway. It caused some attention.

But that didn't matter, really. Bigger things were at stake. Like the end of the world, maybe. Maybe. In fact, more than just maybe.

He flipped on the radio and caught WQXR with the search-channel selector. It eased his nerves, and he settled back against the cushions, realizing that his legs had been tense on the pedals. *Ilya Murometz* swelled out of the twin speakers in the car, and he found himself humming. It had been a rough week.

One of the Research Unlimited agents at Oleph-Jameson had been detected—he silently cursed the new checking system the company had installed—and been given notice. Then the reports had started to come in. So unexpected. After nearly eight years, all at once, like a

topsy-turvy tidal wave, things had started to pop. Perhaps it had been the pace of the work, that it was inevitable reports would heave in all at once. But with the exception of the Gulf Coast plants, and the half dozen from New England and the Midwest, the final report was fleshed out nicely.

Now was the time to take their information to the people. That was the point where Jay and himself disagreed. Stelmack contended they must deal with the companies and the Senate; Nick felt it was the newspapers, the radio and television stations, the magazines, leaflets, carcards . . . every means available to modern man to reach his fellows. They had to reach the people who were involved.

But before he could feel secure about doing anything in the open, to jeopardize eight years research, he had to satisfy this crawl-bothering suspicion of Markheim. There was no reason why the largest outfit of its kind in America should be doing it right, disposing their waste properly, when other outfits—not much smaller—were all in accord about dumping their waste in streams, leaving it in arroyos or gullies, spraying it by hoses into the ocean. Only one

firm was doing it the proper way. Markheim.

There was more than just an odd niggling wonder in Nick Bonham's mind about Markheim. There was open dislike. It had been Markheim who had been instrumental in ruining Jay Stelmack, and Bonham had decided to find out what there was to find out about the atomic wastes attitude at Markheim International.

Ilya Murometz clashed to a close, and the announcer cut in with comments. Then he began a sharply-tinted biography of Charles Ives (Bonham recognized the phrasing as having been lifted from the recording's liner notes) and then the radio sent forth the involved and wondrous strains of the seldom-heard Ives Second Symphony.

He settled back, and allowed the driving to take care of itself. It was a fine day.

How many more would there be?

The first guarded fence rose up on the circuit roadway somewhere on Montauk Point. It was a specially-laid road, almost tarmac, and built to hold without cracking when the great loaded semi-trailers brought in their cargos. The road had been built on a

slightly rising grade, and had been systematically razed to three hundred feet on either side. It was obvious Markheim International did not want snoopers lurking in nearby underbrush.

A bank of searchlights was spaced every fifteen feet along the high barbed-top fence, and there was a control box of switches on a pole near the guard shack. Bonham realized immediately that impulses from detectors in the road had broadcast his coming to this post. And the fence was energized, of that he was certain.

He pulled up to the fence, and slapped the automatic transmission into neutral, letting the Mercury Montclair idle. No one came out of the hut. He palmed the horn, and then again, angrily.

In a moment, an old man with a .45 strapped to his hip came out of the shack, and walked quickly to the fence. He seemed a good deal more sprightly than his age indicated.

"Yeah?"

"The name is Bonham. Call that in and tell them I want to see Markheim."

"Mr. Markheim?"

He nodded. "Just call in, will you please."

"What was that name?"

"Nick Bonham, Research

Unlimited, New York City. Mr. Markheim knows me. He'll want to see me, so just phone in."

The old man scratched at his stubbled cheek for a rude instant, snorted and cast a suspicious glare at Bonham. Then he turned and hobbled back to the guard shack to phone in to the main building, miles away. Bonham noted the hobbling, which had not been present a moment before; perhaps the old codger was bucking for a disability allotment. Bonham lit a cigarette, a rueful smile on his lips.

In a few minutes, the old man came back, and silently indicating he would open the gate, went to the pole with the control box set on it. He pulled a knife-switch, and the fence slowly opened.

Nick gunned the Mercury through the aperture and paused to get directions from the guard.

"Straight on down the road, take the right fork just before the next fence," the old man told him, but the suspicious glare was still present in his tight features. Nick thanked him and sped down the dusty road.

There were three more fences along the ten miles of road before the great bulk of

Markheim International slipped up out of a bowl in the land. The same procedure was repeated at each of them. Markheim was being cautious, Bonham thought ruefully. Were all these security precautions merely because of the nature of the atomic work being done inside, or was there yet another reason?

As he pulled into the parking lot, he saw trucks and semis, rolling toward the loading docks, and streaming away from the dumps. There was a great deal of activity in the Markheim area. He noticed one van from Oleph-Jameson beside the railroad siding leading into the dump area. So there was interchange between the two huge concerns; that made the waste situation all the more startling. For if such interchange was taking place, there must be the same give-and-take on other levels, and if Markheim had developed a better system of waste disposal, why was it not being employed by O-J also?

A freight train was cool and silent on the siding, but men scurried about it like maggots, unloading sheets of steel and great crates of unmarked goods. Lifts and pulley-trucks were overrunning the area, and in all, it seemed as though there was business

a-plenty to keep Markheim's gigantic staff busy at all times.

Nick parked between two old cars in the lot, each of which bore a green triangle on the windshield with the owner's name and work-number on it, and the legend: *Employee Markheim International* on it.

He drew a cigarette from the nearly-dead pack and lit it with the dashboard lighter, then swung out of the Mercury. It was a short walk to the administration building, a huge three-storied rectangle set about with ingenious landscaping that managed to conceal the windows on the ground level, without keeping sunlight from those within.

The doors opened at his approach, electronically. He smiled sardonically at the ostentatiousness of Markheim International's foyer. It was a composite study of primitivism and modernistic workmanship. Low coffee-tables with wrought aluminum legs stood before foam-rubber couches, and on the tables copies of *Business Week* and *Fortune* blended beautifully with neolithic statuary. Replicas, naturally, but so handsomely chosen, they bespoke culture and a feel for the right way of doing business. Afri-

can tribal heads of the less frightening mien dotted the pale walls, and indirect lighting gave the entire foyer a handsome glow, with no dark corners. An embossed placard above a speaker grille near the door read: *Please state your business and whom you wish to see. Thank you.* It was unsigned.

Bonham walked slowly to the grille, pressed the little azure button beside it, and said, "I'm here to see Mr. Markheim. Nicholas Bonham of Research Unlimited."

A female voice said thank you, wouldn't you have a seat, I'll tell Mr. Markheim at once, and the grille splucked into silence.

Bonham dragged deeply on the cigarette, and blew a thick trail of smoke toward the face of a Fuzzi-watti over the sofa.

He sat down, being careful to pull up the creases in his slacks, and folded his arms across his chest in anticipation. He knew he would not have long to wait.

He was not disappointed, for a few minutes later a tall, handsome fellow came through a doorway that had till then been concealed from Bonham's view by a corner of the room. The tall man wore his hair long, but meticulously combed

back, with the typical lock falling over his high forehead, to indicate fellowship, hard work, or nonchalance. Bonham had not yet decided which it was intended to illustrate.

The tall man marched step-pily across the pile carpet, his hand extended, a how-sincere-I-am smile tacked to his face, and caroled: "Mr. Bonham?" Nick nodded briefly. "My name is Warren Raugland, Assistant to Mr. Markheim."

Bonham stood, pleased to find he was an inch shorter than Raugland, and took the other's hand in a warm clasp.

"Sorry Mr. Markheim couldn't come down himself, Mr. Bonham," Raugland went on, gently persuading Nick to resume his seat on the sofa, and plopping beside him, "but well—you know how things can get upstairs." A conspiratorial edge of a smile, and a half-nudge in the ribs, never completed, but attempted, that bespoke volumes of friendliness and camaraderie.

Nick Bonham would have trusted this man as far as the length of his shoelaces—tied around Raugland's ankles.

"But—" he offered as a delightful alternative, "—Mr. Markheim has asked me to take you on a personally-guided tour of the plants, until he's free, and can come down

to meet us. He suggested four o'clock in the commissary lunchroom. How does that sound?"

What could he answer?

"Fine, that's just fine, Mr. Raugland. I'd very much enjoy seeing Markheim International from close up." They both rose.

Raugland made a partial pitch to ward off any trouble later. "Of course, there are areas that are *Top Secret* you understand, and those areas are closed to us—some of them are so secret we can't find personnel to staff them—" they both laughed in each other's faces. Raugland in heartiness, Bonham in disgust. "—*But*, we want you to ask any questions you feel might help you evaluate our little projects here—" Bonham reflected that only an imbecile would call Markheim International's work "little projects."

"—Shall we go?"

Bonham gave a cavalier bow and indicated Raugland should lead the way. *On the trail, Jolly-boy*, Nick thought.

The tour was cleverly conducted. It was not wise to lead a man up to a building with a *Top Secret* red-card on it and then tell him he could not see it. Better to just keep

him away from it altogether. Their tour skirted the red areas.

Markheim International produced radioactives from raw pitchblende, and the processes themselves were interesting. But every time Nick looked across a stretch of asphalt and saw a hanger-like building, or a small metal-sided shed, with the red-card *Top Secret Keep Out Unauthorized* on it, he felt a strange itch along his nerves. They were keeping him away from those buildings more than even security measures decreed. He had a "crypto" clearance with the government — the highest clearance possible — and so there was no real reason why he couldn't go in those buildings. He knew the level of work being done by Markheim, and if they were keeping him away from these other installations, it was apparently because the level was higher yet, and even top secret than crypto.

He felt his nerves jump again.

And a slow determination settled through him to shake this hail-fellow-well-met-Raugland, and see what one of those buildings held. For instance that great, blank-windowed hanger over there,

with the sealed railroad cars waiting on a siding beside it. He knew it would take some work to get rid of Raugland, but he was determined not to leave the grounds of Markheim International without knowing what was in there.

His opportunity came shortly before lunch.

Raugland — expostulating eagerly on the worth of the projects here, and their intrinsic value to the economic program—had been broadly hinting at lunch for some time.

After they had examined in close detail the "remote" rooms where stainless aluminum arms, with "hands" at their extremities, lifted the radioactive isotopes, and lowered them into lead caskets for storage and transfer, Raugland hit Nick once more with the idea of eating.

"Well, I'll tell you, Raugland—"

"Oh, come on now, Nick, we've been wandering around all day. You can call me Warren, after all. I want you to consider me a friend."

You're nudging it pretty damn hard, brother, Bonham thought. Don't break it. But he wanted no suspicions aroused, if they weren't already, so he replied, "Have it

your way, Warren. At any rate, what I was about to say was, I've got a Minix camera in the car, and if it's all right with you, I'd like to take a few pictures of these "remote" rooms for my files. That is, if they aren't classified."

Raugland let the edge of an apprehensive expression catch at his features, and then banished it, to let it be replaced by that god-awful sincere grin. "Why certainly, Nick. Of course. Our pleasure. These are pretty much standard operations, with the exception of a few improvements our boys have slipped in the last few years. I'm sure Mr. Markheim won't object to your taking some pics.

"Come on, I'll walk you back to your car."

Nick fluffed him off. "No, I'll tell you what. You wait here, and get things set up for a few shots, and I'll take a jog out to the crate, and be back in a minute." He cut away from half Raugland's objection, and started trotting toward the car lot. When he got in among the machines, he took a sharp right, and ran to the end of the row. He was out of the line of observation of the building in which he had left Markheim's aide, and even if the man had followed him, that was all to the good,

for the hanger-like building was further concealed to sight.

He broke from behind the cars and trotted quickly across the asphalt to the edge of the strip. There was a low, wooden fence, almost waist-high, around the building, but there were no wires about it, and no guards nearby. Nick jumped the wall with one hand, and sprinted the rest of the way to the hulk of the structure.

He flattened himself against it, in the receding light of the late afternoon, and edged around till he found a window. It was locked and had been silvered over from the inside. The big double doors of the building had been locked, also. That much he had seen running toward them.

He continued to edge around the building, till he had gained the rear, and he was stepping across the railroad tracks. The big, silent boxcars with their dull aluminum sides waited on the siding. He saw the loading pit.

It was an elevator set-up, with the cage and platform left behind. Obviously, loading had either been ended recently, or was soon to start. He stepped onto the platform and levered the start handle across the semi-circular control plate. The elevator began

to descend. It went down into darkness, and stopped in a few moments, with the metal half-doors closed, above. He stepped off the platform carefully, feeling in front of him for obstacles. His hands encountered large crates.

Bonham lit his cigarette lighter and held it over his head. It was a store-room. Shipping numbers were stamped on the faces of the crates; he moved among them. When he had traversed several corridors between crates, he saw a stairwell, and a circling metal stairway. He mounted it and climbed back to what he assumed was the floor level of the hanger-like building.

The door was unlocked.

He opened it, and was flooded with light.

From where he stood, Nick could see huge metal racks with odd torpedo - shaped mechanisms loaded one on the other in the shelves. Off to the right, far down at the opposite end of the building, a section had been walled off with lead, almost like an office, and through a window, he could see two men in radiation suits, with great long-handled ladles, dipping some dark stuff into split-open torpedos, identical to the ones in the racks.

All through the building—which had but one floor—men were busily engaged in preparing the torpedos, through various stages, for a job Bonham could not figure out.

A loading mechanism was busily hoisting the torpedos onto a cart, off to his left, and he watched the operation with interest. It was a smooth manipulation, with the trembling aluminum arms of the machine lifting the torpedos and setting them onto the cart easily.

Nick rubbed the back of his head. This was the missing factor in the waste problem at Markheim International. Whatever these torpedos were meant to do, they were the reason Markheim was not dumping his waste into refuse pits or streams as the other concerns were doing.

These torpedos were the answer.

He had only a few minutes, before Raugland would become too suspicious and track him through the parking lot. He had to find out what these torpedo - like mechanisms were, and what tie-up they held with the waste problem. The only thing that would help now was bravado.

He stepped quickly through the door, closing it behind

himself, and began walking toward a man with a clipboard, who stood behind a small pedestal-desk, making calculations on the board's pad.

"Okay to smoke in here?" Nick asked, dragging the pack from his jacket pocket. He held it up.

The man with the clipboard looked around, as though a comet had just dropped from the sky, and he wanted to find out where it had left its fiery hole in the ceiling. "Where's your badge?" the man asked, pointing to his own red-white-blue disc, pinned to his smock.

Nick looked abashed, and fumbled with the lighter. "Okay?" he asked, indicating the cigarette. The lab technician nodded, and impatiently reiterated:

"Your badge, hey?"

Nick lit the cigarette and chuckled ruefully. "You know Warren Raugland?" Nick waited an instant. Just long enough to let the technician assume what he wished about the relation between himself and Raugland.

"Raugland. Yeah, I know him. Mr. Markheim's boy, isn't he?"

Nick nodded. "That's him. He told me to come on in here and talk to you, said he'd be

along in a minute, and told me I wouldn't need a clearance badge. Said if you were to ask me I should tell you he cleared it. Said to ask for—uh—what was that name . . ." he let the sentence dangle invitingly. "What's your name? Let's see, it's—"

"Morton. I'm head checker in this section—"

"Right. That's right," Nick exploded with assurance. "You're my man. He told me to come in and make sure you were handling the waste properly."

The technician's face did not clear of suspicion, but his brow wrinkled and he said, "Well, what did you want to know?"

"Well," Nick tentatively edged, "can you give me a quick, and I mean quick, run-down on the procedure here for getting rid of these wastes?"

The technician scratched at the tip of his nose. "Well, that's classified, you know. Say, how did Mr. Raugland tell you to get in—"

Bonham cut him off as though the question was unimportant. "Well, look, can you give me a quick brief-in what they do with these torps after they're loaded?"

The technician became even more suspicious. "Hey, look

now. I hate to be rude about this, but—”

Nick decided his time was up.

“Well, look . . . how about if I go back and get Raugland, and he tells you it’s okay to discuss this with me? Would that suit you?”

The technician tapped a pencil against the clipboard. “Yeah. Sure. I suppose so.”

“Okay then. Be right back,” Nick cheerily waved a hand and walked toward the sliding door in the rear of the building.

He was out the door before the technician could say anything further.

Behind him, in the lead-walled room, men in radiation suits were busily ladling atomic wastes into torpedos.

Somehow, he managed to avoid Raugland, skip his meeting with Markheim, and still get through the network of guards around the reservation. He was on the road back to New York before the full puzzlement of the lead-shielded room hit him. It was obvious now that they were ladling the waste products into the torpedos. The grey, brainlike matter had been atomic castoffs . . . but why?

What possible use could they have for chemical gar-

bage of that nature? Was it some commercial scheme? Was Markheim selling the waste? If so, why the torpedos. And were those firing mechanisms on the snouts of the missiles?

The questions whirled, unanswered, in Bonham’s mind. He had to get back to New York and kick this around with Jay Stelmack. It was something so unseen, so out-of-the-way, it *had* to be vitally important to the project and the problem. If all other manufacturers were disposing of their wastes in a careless, haphazard fashion, why was Markheim spooning them into torps, and then—apparently—sending them out by rail to—where?

Without realizing it, his foot had ground the accelerator almost to the floor.

The Mercury leaped along the highway, back toward New York. It was pure luck, he realized later, that he had not been stopped by a state trooper.

He drove eighty the entire distance.

New York was beginning to clam awake in the cold sharpness of small hour A.M. before he pulled in to the curb in front of the big brownstone on West 93rd Street. He was out of the car and across the

sidewalk before he realized he had left the lights on. To hell with the battery . . . this was more important than running down the battery. He managed to waken everyone asleep in the big three-story building, merely by entering the house.

Inside, the dusk of leftover-night still shadowed the house. He threw on light switches and banged on Betty Seiwert's door steadily, till she opened it. Sleep stuck to her brown eyes, and her auburn hair was a raggedy mass, falling over her forehead.

"Well . . . *'morning*," she snapped. "End of the world, or just a whim?"

"Both," Bonham snapped back. "Get Jay out of the sack. There's work to be done. Lots of it, and fast!"

The urgency in his voice brought her to full wakefulness, and she drew the housecoat tighter about herself. "I'll get him. He slept in the workshop last night."

She slipped past him and disappeared down the corridor. A moment later Bonham heard the elevator sighing down to the sub-basement where Jay Stelmack conducted his experiments.

Bonham took the steps three at a time, and hit the

top floor at full speed. He slipped his jacket off, still moving and draped it over the bannister newel post.

When pudgy Stelmack entered the office, Bonham was on the phone. Nick motioned his partner to the easy chair beside the desk, and went on talking. "Yeah, Bernie. Right. Right. No, I don't want trouble out there, but I've *got* to know about those torpedos. I can't understand how . . . what? . . . Gotshaulk was in there? Why wasn't this included in his report then?" A long pause, and Bonham lit a cigarette during the silence. Then, "how well do you know this Gotshaulk? Can he be completely trusted, or was he just canvassed for the job after you found out he—"

Another long pause. Bonham puffed furiously on the cigarette, an expression of displeasure suffusing his rough features.

"Well, look Bernie . . . I've *got* to have that information soonest. Today if possible, no later than tomorrow. And I want to see this Gotshaulk. If I was able to find out about these torpedos, just by chance, surely he should have known about it long before this, working there. I smell a buy, and I think your boy Gotshaulk is in on it.

"Okay. Yeah. Yeah, Right enough. I'm not tagging *you* with the blame, Bernie, but I want to see this Gotshaulk as soon as possible. Set up a meet for us tonight, if possible. Get him down from Markheim's plant."

There were a few more scattered exchanges, and Bonham hung up, the expression of displeasure frozen about his lips. He turned to Stelmack.

"You don't look jolly," Jay ventured.

"Delirious," Bonham answered, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of the first. "I found a kipper in the works. At Markheim."

He quickly related what had happened, and Stelmack's face drew down in a replica of Bonham's. When he had completed the narrative, to the time of return, Nick ended, "I called Bernie Auer, to get him on this thing. I want a complete report out of Markheim International by tomorrow." Auer was head of Bonham's carefully - constructed report service, with agents in each of the concerns involved.

"It strikes me odd, Nick," Stelmack put in, "that the Markheim man we had in there, as long as he's been there—how long now? Over

two years—had no mention of this in his files. Let me see that dossier, eh."

Bonham flipped through the stacked reports and handed out a thick one. *Markheim* was lettered on the flap.

"You won't find anything in there. I checked." Bonham drew sharply on the cigarette.

"Collusion?" Stelmack inquired.

Nick nodded. "I suppose. There had to be a slip-up somewhere along the line. And a sell-out. The man's name is Gotshaulk, and Bernie says he was highly recommended. All I can conclude is that Markheim bought him out, after discovering who he was. Or—"

"Or—" Stelmack finished, "—this Gotshaulk sold us out for a price, to Markheim. I wouldn't put it past Markheim."

"Now hold on, Jay. Don't let your bad feelings about what Markheim did to you color your logic. He's not a killer, nor a subversive. If he's doing something with those torps, you can make book it's either something commercial, with a big dollar in it for Markheim International, or a government project. Under wraps. With authority. I'm inclined to the former viewpoint, though. I'd

have heard *something* out of Washington if it had originated there."

He snapped his fingers.

Bonham lifted the receiver again, dialed a three-digit number and waited. "Line to Washington," he said, then waited. "DElaware 4-0009."

Another long pause, and a re-light of cigarette from cigarette butt. Stelmack sat brooding, leafing through the report.

Then, "Walter? Nick here. Listen, what have you got newest on Markheim I.?"

Pause.

"Any word on waste disposal by torpedo? Yes, that's right, torpedo. Nothing? Can you call me back? Right. Give it an extra half hour, and get me particulars. This is no rumor, Walt. I saw it yesterday. I want to know."

Hurried goodbyes, and Bonham hung up.

Almost immediately, the phone rang again. Bonham picked up the receiver, as Betty Seiwert came in carrying a tray with coffee urn and cake on a plate. "Hello. Yeah, Bernie. Tonight? Fine. Good work. What's that? Why not here? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-yeah. Right. Right, Well, it stinks on ice, but if that's how he wants to shove it, we'd bet-

ter not take a chance on his running scared.

"Give me the address over there." Bonham snapped his fingers impatiently at Stelmack, and the little man looked up in confusion for a second, then sobered and withdrew the ball point pen from his smock pocket when he realized that was the cause of Bonham's snapping fingers.

"Okay, Bernie, go ahead. One - one - five East Sixtieth Street. The Cafe—what? Oh, the Cafe Noir. Right. Eight sharp. You can tell him I'll be there.

"What? No, I don't think that would be smart. I can play it by ear. I don't want to lean on this Gotshaulk, I only want to pry some words out of him. Even if I can't bribe him—which I think I can—I can tell whether or not he's lying, which will help some.

"Okay, Bernie. Thanks a lot. No, don't worry about it. Everything will square off." A long pause, and Bonham's face was veiled by smoke. When the smoke rose, his eyes held a strange fire.

"I know what you mean, Bernie. So long . . . and take it easy."

Bonham said nothing for a moment after racking the receiver. Betty Seiwert and Jay Stelmack watched their boss

for that long moment, and then Stelmack ventured:

"What was that last part, Nick?"

Bonham rubbed at the stubble of beard that dotted his face, and replied, "Bernie asked me had I ever gotten that strange, sad feeling that things were coming to a head; things that had no form or name. Just a vague feeling of something impending."

They continued to stare at him silently.

Bonham ground out the cigarette.

"I hate to admit it. But I've had the same feeling ever since I saw those damned torpedos at Markheim's. Things are coming to a head, and we may not like what happens."

His two co-workers remained silent. They exchanged sharp glances, and Betty Seiwert pursed her lips.

A false smile of jollity broke across Bonham's features. "Come on, pall-bearers, we've got work to do!"

Three and a half hours later, the Washington call was returned.

Walter Graviss was a secretarial aide to a man of great influence in the nation's capitol. His contacts were many and far-flung, his manner discreet, his confidence respected.

There were ways to obtain information that Graviss had discovered and refined, till it was said he could almost predict the future, so close to events was he. This remark was made, however, only by the few intimate associates with whom he did business. A man of exemplary moral and political habits, he was in no sense of the word an informer, or a panderer of gossip. His job was foremost, and in the pursuit of that job, should he run across data that would serve the purpose of other worthwhile agencies, he was not remiss at passing it along. He asked no monetary remuneration, merely the two-way flow of information, should the need arise. His contacts had often provided him with tips and reports that had simplified his own job for his employer.

Graviss was not merely respected in Washington, he was trusted completely. A rare man with a rare talent. He called three and a half hours later.

"Hello, Nick?"

"Right, Walter. What did you find out?"

"I don't know how they kept this under wraps so effectively, Nick, but it's big. So big I'm not sure I should pass it along . . ."

"Walt, if this was a footsie deal, I'd string along with your qualms, you know that. But there is so much more at stake here, so damned much more, I've got to press you, and I've got to know what you've found out. Walt, you *know* what Jay's calculations say, and you know how soon we'll be reaching that crucial stage. If something is happening out there at Markheim that will hasten the day, Walt, I've *got* to know about it."

There was a tortured pause, and then Graviss's voice came across the line. "I know. That's the only reason I'm telling you this, Nick. I know what you and Jay are trying to do. But this affects national security, don't forget that. I'd hate to go down with your ship if this leaks out."

Bonham spoke tightly. "Walt, if this is as big as you say, and affects the problem as severely, the whole *world's* boat may be sinking soon . . . and no ark in sight."

"Okay. Here it is. The government has given Markheim a gigantic contract, for the manufacture of those torpedoes you saw. They are loaded with waste material from the piles, and somehow Markheim's research chemists have devised a way to make the

slopes tremendously blast-potential. I wasn't able to get the specific formulæ on that process, but my sources tell me one of those torpedoes going off could quite literally wipe all of New York and its suburbs off the face of the globe."

Bonham sat in a shocked, rigid silence.

When he had not spoken for a moment, Graviss said, "Nick? You there?"

"Yeah, I'm here, Walt. Go on, give me the rest."

There had to be more.

"Markheim is loading the torps and freighting them to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where they are loaded under max security on cargo ships. Then they're taken out—way out—you know near where, way out — and dropped. They've got special detectors on them, so when the subs come to rendezvous, they can pick up the torps without trouble.

"Then the subs just sit and wait. Maybe for the Reds to start something, and then, bam, we slap a few of these fish down their throats . . . or maybe some jive-happy four star decides he's had enough hanky-panky with the Commies, and he gives the word to start driving the fish home. Either way, we're in the middle of WW Three, Nick.

"That's the story."

Bonham's head was sunk in one hand, tipped down in a position of utter defeat. He managed to muffledly speak into the phone. "You said they're dropping the waste torps in the sea . . . to be picked up later?"

"That's it, Nick."

"Okay, Walt. Thanks a lot. I'll return the favor."

Weariness trembled in his voice.

Just before he clicked off, Graviss answered, "If you're around long enough to return it. If any of us are around long enough."

Then the click.

Nick Bonham did not move for a very long time.

Until Jay Stelmack burst into the office, screaming that the potential count had gone up over the red line.

Then Bonham moved very fast indeed.

The wire read:

You must cancel Markheim atomic wastes project immediately stop cannot relate particulars now stop will be in Washington this morning stop arrive airport one seventeen a.m. stop Eastern flight 506 stop meet me for most urgent talk stop project must repeat must be halted soonest

stop imminent threat if you disregard stop stop stop stop

Nicholas G. Bonham

The telegram was addressed to a man of considerable age, whose face was as familiar to every American as the head of each household. The man received the telegram at seven-twenty that evening, just half an hour before Nick Bonham was to go to The Cafe Noir to meet a man named Gotshaulk. At seven twenty-three, Nick Bonham strapped on a short barreled Police Positive, checked its chambers, and slid it back into the shoulder holster. It did little to detract from the cut of his Brooks Brothers shantung suit.

At seven-fifty, Nick Bonham alighted from a taxi before 115 East Sixtieth Street. The restaurant was a down-the-stairs affair with a tri-colored canopy over the stairs down. The building was an old brownstone, vaguely reminiscent of Bonham's own residence before the restoration work had been done. It was sadly in need of a sand blasting. The front window of the building's restaurant was twice the size of a normal window, which seemed oddly inappropriate for all it

held was a glassy opaqueness and a tiny decorous neon twist that read *le cafe noir* in pale blue.

It did not even click on and off.

Bonham paid the driver and surveyed the street as the taxi's tail lights scurried around the corner. It was dark, as most Manhattan streets were dark at eight o'clock, and no street light in the middle of the block. The only radiance was cast by the light blue neon sign in the window. It threw a dim semi-circle of vague blue light out across the edge of sidewalk. There was a slight eeriness.

Bonham carefully stepped out of the semi-circle.

Bernie Auer had called again later that day, while the reports were being dictated, and preparations were being made for Nick's flight that night to Washington. Auer had said Gotshaulk would be waiting outside the little bistro, and that Nick should light a cigarette to identify himself.

Nick threw down the half-smoked cigarette he had lit in the taxi, and withdrew the pack from his jacket pocket. He shook a fresh cigarette up and stuck it between his lips. As he was lighting it, he caught the flutter of movement

off to his right, and above him.

He stepped out toward the gutter, slowly, giving no indication of haste or fright. On the steps leading up to the old brownstone, a man had stepped out of the shadows around the ornate doorway arch. He stood there silently watching Bonham.

After a time that seemed long, but was very very short, the man rubbed his chin, and looking down out of pocketed shadows said, "Mr. Bonham?"

He had a thick German accent. His coat needed a cleaning.

"Yes, that's right. You Gotshaulk?"

The man stepped completely free of the webbed shadows and began to descend the stairs. He was dumpy, built like a muffin, and his face was unshaved. He wore his hat, battered and dirty, down around his protruding ears. He seemed ill at ease.

When he stood before Bonham — Nick towering over him—the little man attempted in broken English, "Mr. Bonham, I—I vas going tdo tell you when I vas free of dat blace. Mr. Margeim he—he vell, idt vas much money, and I vas—"

He broke off in a ragged burble, as though what he had done had risen in his gorge to choke him.

Bonham's resolve to thrash the man who had sold out to Markheim was dissolved in an instant. This Gotshaulk was pathetic. Perhaps an immigrant out of Germany only by escape and terror, this little man would naturally break under the strain of being an operative. It had been Bernie Auer's fault for hiring him. Where the recommendations that had originally guaranteed Gotshaulk the job had come from, Bonham could not suspect.

"It's all right, Mr. Gotshaulk. No one is going to hurt you. All I want is some info—"

"That's all, Bonham. Come on, you're going out to see Mr. Markheim."

Three men had come from nowhere. A dark Cadillac was edging along the curb, farther down the block, and beside him, three big men in tweedy overcoats were coming closer, their shoulders chockablock and huge.

It had been a set-up.

Nick Bonham made a dash for the street, and escaped the three men for an instant. The Cadillac screeched forward madly and slewed across his

path, forcing him back into the arms of the three men.

Bonham thrashed out wildly, and one open hand encountered a head of hair. He grasped and yanked down with all his might. One of the men screamed like a woman, and he felt fingers pulling his hand away. Dim cursing struck out at him. Bonham continued to writhe, not allowing them to get a handle on him.

Then he had a hand around someone's stomach, and he shoved. He was free for an instant. He leaped back, right into Gotshaulk, who had been standing quietly watching, and whipped the Police Positive free of its sheath.

"Okay. That's it. Recreation hour's over. Back up."

The three men took steps forward, saw the tiny black mouth of the weapon, and edged backwards.

"Hey, now, wait a minute, Jack. Take it easy," one of the men said placatingly. "Nobody wants to hurt ya, doncha know. Just let us alone and we'll pile outta here."

The second of the trio smashed an elbow into the speaker's side. "Shut up. He isn't going to shoot you, you clown."

"Lissen, Aaron," the first

man spoke up vehemently, "old man Markheim said no rough stuff. He said it'd be a pick, an' that was all. I don't want no holes in my head, man."

The man who had been called Aaron snarled at the speaker. "Just shut up. Just shut up, will you?"

The speaker bit his lip, and his hands went up over his head reflexively as Nick steadied the weapon. "We ain't hipped, man. Like we got nothin', y'know?"

"I thought Markheim was above this type of stuff," Nick chuckled. "Go on, get out of here, all of you!"

The three men needed no further urging. They turned and ran to the Cadillac. Aaron pulled open the back door, and started to climb in.

The man who had pleaded with Bonham turned, and started speaking: "Thanks, Mr. Bonham . . . we wasn't gonna—"

But Aaron grabbed him by the coat collar and dragged him bodily into the car. The doors slammed, and the automobile snaked away from the curb. Bonham stood alone with Gotshaulk. The little, dumpy German was clutching and re-clutching his hands.

"Come on, Gotshaulk," Bon-

ham said gently. "Let's go talk." He holstered the weapon and took the little man under the arm, very carefully. He led him down the stairs into the smoke and soft music of the bar.

Nick indicated a dim booth at one side of the narrow club, and the nervous little man slid into it. Suddenly realizing he had left his hat on, Gotshaulk whipped it off, crushing the battered lid between his wide hands.

"Misdter Bonham, I must . . . I must shpeak . . . idt vas nodd vhat you tink. I vas nodd vorkingk vor Misdter Margeim, against you, I . . . I come from Berlin, Misdter Bonham. There are many things you vould nodd believe habben there, even today. I haff a daughter, Misdter Bonham . . . she isz only a child—the Russians . . . three years ago . . . I haff heard only thadt it vould take much influence to gedt her free. Mr. Margeim promised he vould gedt my Berte free if I vould send not-true reports. I did not *vant* to do it . . ."

He had spoken quickly, almost frantically, and the words had cascaded forth, even broken and twisted as they were with raw emotion. Nick nodded, and his face grew dark at the thought of

Markheim using such a vicious sword to hold Gotshaulk in line.

Finally, when the little refugee had purged himself, Nick felt himself wrung dry also. "It's okay, Gotshaulk. It's all over now. It might have been different if I had known about those torpedos months ago . . . but now, well, it's too late.

"But," he paused, and lit a cigarette, "it's not too late to help you if I can. Could you use another job? I don't think Markheim will have much use for you now. What was your specialty?"

A waiter interrupted them, then, and Nick ordered two mixed drinks at a hasty nod from Gotshaulk. Then he looked back at the German.

"I was a specialist in reactor chemistry."

Nick nodded. He really didn't need Gotshaulk on his team, but charity was out, and they might have a use for a man of his background. "Ah-hm," Nick pursed his lips. "The theory of reactor poisoning. You dealt directly with the waste problem, then?"

Gotshaulk bobbed his head up and down.

"You've got a job, Gotshaulk, and I'll see what I can do about getting your daughter out of Berlin. I mean that

truly; not the way Markheim meant it. Didn't you *know* he was only stringing you on until he—"

The waiter returned, but without the drinks. Nick looked up as the waiter leaned down and whispered, "Is your name Nicholas Bonham?" Nick nodded. "Phone, sir, in the front," and the waiter slid away.

Nick asked Gotshaulk to wait, and made his way down the crowded bar to the phone. He picked it up, and said, "Yes?"

It was Jay Stelmack.

"Nick!" his voice was a high tremolo. Set to break. Fragile, glass-like, almost hysterical. "I thought you'd still be there."

"What is it, Jay?"

"Forget Gotshaulk and forget the torpedos. They're not important now. Nothing matters anymore!"

"What the hell are you talking about, Jay?"

"Don't you know! The torpedos, they must have broken open, when they were dumped in the sea. Or the waste had already seeped down, from the other companies. It's all over, Nick! All finished! We're dead, Nick!"

"Jay! Snap out of it, for heaven's sake What the hell

are you trying to *say*? Tell me?"

Stelmack's voice rose another degree. "It's the end of the world, Nick! The end! He laughed hysterically. "I told them, I warned them! Years ago, I told them!"

"Jay!"

"We're dead, Nick! Dead!"

"What's happened, Jay..."

Then silence. And finally, softly, Stelmack said simply: "It's started, Nick."

Cleveland was gone, and the smoke and cindery plume of soot rose up around the Beechcraft. Bonham wiped a filthy hand over his eyes, leaving a dirty, charry smear running from one temple to the other.

Betty Seiwert coughed beside him.

The plane heeled again, and dipped.

He steadied it, cursing, and swooped lower.

Beelzebub was growing larger. It had moved out into the Lake, and its slope was an angry thing. Red and furious as a boil, its mouth gaped at the dark sky and its throat coughed lava phlegm at the heavens. It was getting worse, Nick could see that. The cone was growing, and growing, and seemed about to spurt into giantness never known by

a volcano. And it was like this all over the United States. All over the world.

Stelmack had come through earlier with a relay message from Walt Graviss in Washington. Vladivostock was gone, and they had the sweetest pair of twin volcanos the world had ever known. Minsk was in considerable trouble. Novosibirsk was a mass of flaming volcanos, each spouting as though it wanted to disgorge the Earth's guts. The panic was on. It was bad, and getting worse, from Makhachkala to Pyasinski Zdliv; with no sign of abatement.

Jay Stelmack had been right.

Jay Stelmack had been Nostradamus.

Jay Stelmack was probably back in the City, getting himself messily stewed.

"Nick?" Betty's voice was small.

"Uh?" he didn't feel like small talk.

"What can we do?"

"Do? What the hell do you think? We can hang up here and get smoke in our eyes till we run out of fuel. Then we go back down and pray a cone doesn't shoot up under our cans."

He looked out the cockpit. The sky was the color of rotted flesh.

"I don't like it," she said, with fear high in her voice.

"You think I *do*?" he snapped, not looking at her. Then, "Oh hell. Sorry. But you wanted to come along."

"I—I know. I wanted to be . . . in the plane."

He looked at her then, and there was more than fear mixing in her eyes. He had known for some time what her emotions toward him were—despite their polite banter. But her wanting to be with him when she thought the end was near, that was something he could not pass off with a wisecrack. He took her hand.

"It'll be okay, Betty. I'm sure it'll be okay."

"Shut up, Nick. Just shut up!" Her eyes were beginning to swim with tears, and she turned away from him, releasing his hand.

The Beechcraft swooped out over Shaker Heights, then back down toward Cleveland proper.

There was a bleat from the radio. "Nest to Sparrow Three," it said. "Nest over to Sparrow Three."

Nick lifted out the hand mike and depressed the stud. "Sparrow Three to Nest. This is Sparrow Three, Nest. Over."

Jay Stelmack's voice, oddly-

toned, but strong, came back. "Nick, can you hit Detroit and give me a report? I just picked up a kc 710 Conelrad from there."

Bonham stared at the hand mike for a long instant. There was something in Stelmack's voice that had not been there before. Something more vibrant. Was Jay corked? "Yeah," he murmured to himself. Stelmack was still talking.

"—can't re-fuel, you can always drop down at Cleveland Hopkins and take on another load. I've got an idea, Nick, and I need that poop from Detroit. Can you feed me? Over."

Nick fingered the mike uncomfortably. He didn't like Betty in this thing. It wasn't so hot up here. The convection currents were turning the air turbulent as the inside of a mixmaster, and he was afraid they might get caught upair, and the nearest port under some cone.

But, "Okay, Jay. I'll set down at Hopkins and pick up a fuel load. Call 'em and let on we're downwind of them, coming in. Over."

"Roger, Nick, will do. Over and out."

Nick racked the hand-mike and did an immelman. The sturdy Beechcraft rode the

heated air, winging toward the airport.

The sky was black with death.

Detroit was gone. The entire Great Lakes region was a mass of death and boiling destruction. Where cities had stood, now only monster ant-hills of volcanic ash and great seas of lava broke the horizon. Nothing could be done. The evacuation plans had, of course, broken down in many places, and the toll of cremated and buried alive was unbelievable.

In New York, behind a desk of phones that never ceased ringing, Nick Bonham went down and down into helplessness and terror. This was it . . . the end. The end of the world. They'd frittered and fought, and diddled away the centuries. Stones, and bows and swords and guns and hydrogen bombs. Now there was no sense to it, no time for it, everything was pale and dying and the people could feel the Earth vomiting under their feet. The world was dying, and no satellites, no summit conferences, no territorial disputes, nothing . . . none of it, none of it meant anything.

Once, early in the morning, he cried.

Jay was downstairs, in the lab. He had left word with Brad, before Nick and Betty had returned from the airfield, under no circumstances was he to be disturbed. Nick had been edged to needle-point, and this news of Jay's apparent whim was almost too much. "The planet's exploding around us and he's got the 'alones'."

But he had abided with Stelmack's wishes and had left him alone. It had been almost a full day since the flight over Beelzebub and the Detroit Marker. No one had seen Jay Stelmack. "What's he doing down there—saving the world?" Nick snapped when Betty brought in a frozen TV dinner, later that day.

She shrugged. "Why don't you get some sleep, Nick? It's been almost three days."

He looked up at her. "Don't sound like *Good Housekeeping*, Betty, that's all I ask. You know I can't sack out. There's too much to be done—while there's time." As if to punctuate his words with truth, the phone rang. He grabbed for it almost convulsively, and reached toward the cigarette pot as a reflex. He was lighting the cigarette and listening, nodding his head but saying nothing, when she turned to leave. He caught

the movement, and murmured, "Hold it, Frank," pushing the speaker into his sweat-tight shirt.

"Betty . . ."

She paused, not turning, but tense, and he said slowly, "Sorry."

She bobbed her head slightly, and her chin lowered. But her back was very straight, and he could say no more. She left the room, and closed the door quietly behind her.

He stared at the place where she had stood for a moment without time, and then raised the receiver to his ear. "Go ahead, Frank."

The call was no better than any of the hundred he had received before it. Sumatra had felt the latest concussion. No volcano, but worse. Fissures twenty miles wide and nearly a hundred long. Upheavals in the trenches along the China Sea and out into the Pacific. A trio of tidal waves had decimated the island. No evacuees to be spoken about. The total of lost was now past figuring. Into the hundreds of thousands, with no end in sight . . . until the end was in sight.

He hung up, and choked on the smoke of his cigarette.

And Stelmack was in the basement. Saving the world.

The days were no longer clear, the skies were no longer sweet. The air was a dust-clogged mass that chewed at the lungs, that made the eyes smart. The grass was dying, and the fields were covered with even films of ash and pumice. The nights were no longer silent. They trembled, and the horizon shivered with the flame-light of volcanic eruptions, tingeing the sky. The many smells of death rode the wind, carrying proof of the end to the four corners of the Earth, where men sank to their knees, and prayed, who had never known prayer before.

The wastes had seeped down. The metamorphosed garbage of a million nuclear experiments had filtered down through the soil, and the streams, and the seas, and had banked the fires of the inner Earth, changing their timbre, altering their structure, turning the Earth into a gigantic atomic pile.

Contained within itself . . . but without damping rods.

The wastes had been ignored, but they had gone to the heart of the planet, like a cancer eating at flesh. The products had been dumped in their torpedos, and had broken open . . . had gone down into the Cayman Trench, and fur-

ther. Till the Earth had boiled, and coughed, and heaved, and the volcanos had begun.

Now death rode the wind, and the planet erupted. No relief was in sight. Daily, more areas of blight were opened, as the world fought itself, and tore itself to pieces. Great chunks of France and Australia were hurled hundreds of miles in the air by eruptions that had never been considered possible. It was a nightmare of violence, unleashed, violence dominant, violence triumphant.

And Jay Stelmack saved the world.

... or at least told the world it was saved.

A week after he had gone down into the lab, a week of frozen meals heated and shoved inside the door — sometimes consumed, sometimes not—and a week of Bonham getting progressively nastier and more futility-filled, Jay Stelmack emerged.

His face was the white of a man locked in a cell for fifty years. His eyes were red and rivered with crimson lines. His face was drawn down, sunk in emotions that went without name or expression. But the strength was there, too. It was a far different Stelmack who emerged from the lab, bearing a thick sheaf

of notes and calculations, strata diagrams and black-lined maps. It was a different man; a man Nick Bonham could not tag as better or worse.

But Lord how different.

"It will be over soon, Nick."

The little man fell into the easy chair beside Bonham's desk. He folded his hands over the sheaf of notes, and stared at Bonham's weary face.

"Over? What do you mean? It'll tear up completely?"

Stelmack shook his head. "No, not that at all. It's almost over. It's strange." His voice was whisper-light, as though a great truth had come to amaze him.

Bonham was tired. Tired of it all. But more than anything, tired of waiting for the end. "I don't understand, Jay." He was only half interested, even at this. It had been too much.

"The volcanos, Nick. Something we never considered. The Earth takes care of itself, Nick. It can't stand pain, any more than we can. It's got to have safety valves."

Bonham looked up. He wanted to rest his head on his arms, lie down his heavy head on the desk blotter, and forget the world that was disintegrating outside there. But there was something to what

Stelmack was saying; something important. What was it—?

"The volcanos, Nick, they've saved us. The heat banked down there, and the wastes poisoned the inside of the planet, and the explosions started. Sure they did, Nick . . . and if they hadn't, the planet would have torn itself apart all at once.

"The volcanos were the release valves. They blew free, and they saved the Earth, Nick. Soon the poisons inside will be purged, soon the temperatures will normalize, and it will be over."

Bonham wiped a hand across his eyes. "You didn't know that before, Jay."

Stelmack scratched doggily at his unshaved cheek. "I don't know, Nick. I suppose I suspected it, perhaps subconsciously, but I was — well, there's a lot of things. I was eaten up with grief about Nora and my son; I was bitter toward the scientific world for damning me; I hated Markheim for what he had done to me . . . actually, I'd done it to myself. There were a lot of things, Nick. And I think I *wanted* the world to die.

"That would have given me plenty of misery-company, on the biggest scale a man could

want. I was in sick shape, Nick."

Bonham sat up straighter, and looked at this new person who lived within the runty shell of Jay Stelmack's body. "What changed it, Jay?"

Stelmack grinned tightly, ruefully.

"I didn't like the idea of dying."

Bonham's eyes turned to the ceiling. "Clown," he bleated in exasperation.

"Seriously, Nick. I started to work on calculations, how long it would take for the blast to come. And the more I fuddled with those equations, the more logical it seemed. The explosions and volcanos have been steadily increasing, up till two days ago. Then they leveled off, and nothing new opened. The first ones . . . Beelzebub and the Detroit Marker and the Mormon Mountain, as well as the three in the Sahara, they all went quiet. It was an indication, Nick. It had to be. When I knew what I was looking for, it wasn't hard finding it."

Bonham slid back in his chair, grabbing up a cigarette, and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Stelmack asked.

Nick lit the cigarette and puffed a cloud of smoke at

his partner. "To sleep. It's been a while."

"No dice, Nick," Stelmack stopped him. "There's still work to be done. And this is vital. The volcanos won't destroy us. We've had a hell of a shock and we've lost a lot of people and property, but we'll come out of it."

"But it's still got a little time to run its course. We have four or five more big ones opening in the next few days, as far as I can tell from these stress patterns." He tapped the sheaf of notes.

Bonham turned back. "You mean we should evacuate those areas?"

"Precisely. I've estimated clear areas, where emergency towns should be set up. Now it's up to you—Mr. Organizer—to get the government on this thing."

"Here are the lists." He handed over a sheet of paper with smudges and ink stains and a list of names on it. The list said:

Concepcion, Paraguay
Tamatave, Madagascar
(tidal waves)
Hargeisa, British
Somaliland (?)
El Paso-Abilene Area
Baffin Bay (underwater)
Minhow, China

Nick fingered the list and

read it over again. It was a rough sheet. "Where are safe areas?" he asked. Stelmack stood up and unfolded a map, next in the sheaf of papers.

"Here," he said, pointing to a colored area in China, and, "here," pointing to Baja California, and, "here and here." There were only four areas in that color, but several others in darker shades.

"Not enough," Nick commented.

"The ones in red are sure safe, from what I can tell," Stelmack pointed out. "The ones in pink and blue are pretty much sure, and the ones in grey are maybes. They ought to be used in that order. I think they'll do."

He dumped the sheaf of papers on the chair, and started for the door.

"Now where the hell are *you* going?" Nick asked.

"To bed," Stelmack grinned over his shoulder . . .

"It's been a *long* time, Nick. A long, long time."

He went out, and Nick smiled quietly, with his eyes and with his mouth. It had been a long time for Jay Stelmack. Years, in fact. But he would sleep now. And *Time* would have him on the cover again. This time, perhaps as Man of the Year.

It had been a long time for

a lot of people, all over the world, Nick thought sadly. He reached for the phone, and got the line to Graviss in Washington.

As he waited, he lit a cigarette, and his craggy face relaxed.

It had been a long time, and perhaps this would wise them up. Perhaps. It probably wouldn't. Life was no fairy tale, to end happily. But if anything would do it, this last terror might.

He said, "Hello, Walt? That you? Listen, Jay just told me . . ."

Later, he slept.


The evacuation of Minhow was the only one that did not come off successfully. The volcano they later dubbed The Sword of Chiang Kai-Shek erupted too quickly. Even so, the operation had been under way for several days, and the total lost was considerably less than it might have been, had Bonham not been as quick to relay Stelmack's data as he had.

Then, one day, they realized it had been finished for some time. One night it was quiet. And the next day was clearing . . . and the next.

Then the world realized it was over, and things went their way. Not the same as

$E^2 = A^2 + B^2$

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they had been, for that was impossible with nearly one-fifth of the world's population dead. But things — life, the search, the survival—went on, and the fields were cleared out, and the rubble was raked back, and the seas moved in their courses, and the rain fell.

Markheim lost his contract, and Gotshaulk found his daughter. Stelmack went back to work, and walked the streets without fear or re-creation.

And Nick Bonham found he had become something of a

(Continued on page 59)

Who Steals My Mind...

By LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Steve Rennon had never thought of suicide in his life—until he saw the speeding car. That was how it started. The madness spread. Someone was promoting chaos and destruction.
But how? Why?

HIS name was Steve Rennon, his official title was detective-sergeant, and he was an alert-looking young man with reddish hair, a boyish, freckled face, and a slender body that was actually about as frail as that of an adult tiger. His generous expanse of mouth was arranged in a warm, infectuous grin. Total strangers who passed him on the street found themselves compelled through some mysterious psychological chemistry to grin back at him, though when he had passed they frequently stopped to stare after him.

If there was anything wrong with the world that sunny spring afternoon, Steve Rennon was not aware of it. He paused at the intersection of Main and High Streets to

wait for the light to change, grinning happily at the gay throng of shoppers that gathered around him there at the corner, and running an appreciative eye over the late-model cars that roared past.

Half a block away a bus was building up speed to beat the light. It came thundering towards him, and suddenly Rennon's grin dissolved. He stared at the looming menace of the bus, his lips pressed tightly together, his face pale beneath its galaxy of freckles. A thought leaped into his consciousness and rested there, gnawing and prodding.

"What's the use? What have I got to live for? They're all stupid, greedy fools. Get it over with. This bus—one long step, and then no more worries. Watch it, now.



For no apparent reason, the girl turned and attacked.

Watch it! Have to time it just right, or the fool driver might have time to stop. Watch it . . . get ready . . . *now!*"

He jerked himself away, and staggered backwards into the crowd. The light changed, the waiting pedestrians crowded out into the street, and Rennon continued his retreat as far as the polished façade of the First National Bank Building, where he placed a trembling hand against the smooth stone surface to support himself. He rested there, breathing deeply, and shaking his head unbelievably.

"What a stupid thing to be thinking!" he told himself. "Why, I never . . ."

But he had thought it. That much he couldn't deny. He had thought it right up to the *now*, and suddenly the thought had disintegrated into a rancorous, sinister, echoing laugh. He had thought the thought, but he hadn't laughed the laugh. He puzzled it through for perhaps two minutes before he reached a conclusion.

He had thought the thought, and the thought wasn't his.

He said to himself, "Next stop, the state mental hospi-

tal. Check your strait jackets, please."

He shook his head again, and stepped away from the building. No sooner had he pointed his mental processes at another try at the intersection, than he found himself face to face with an exceedingly angry young lady. Her face went white, and then red, before his startled eyes. It was a highly attractive face, but Rennon did not have time for the briefest of mental whistles.

Because suddenly, inexplicably, unjustly, and without any warning whatsoever, she slapped him.

It was a good slap, delivered with a robust, circular swing and a slight pivot that enabled her to get her shoulder behind it. Rennon could not remember ever getting slapped more efficiently, even when he deserved it. Inwardly he was all for turning her over his knee and paddling her, but good. Outwardly he grinned benignly at her.

His grin had the happy faculty of broadening when he became angry, and the grin he gave the girl was one of colossal proportions. He said quietly, "Have we met somewhere before?"

The grin had its effect. The girl exclaimed, "Oh!" And

then, as her face paled, she gasped, "Then it wasn't you!"

"If whatever it was deserved a slap, then it wasn't me," Rennon said.

He looked at the girl approvingly. She stared at him, her lips parted slightly, blank dismay in her face.

"Maybe I can help," he said, showing her his credentials. "What is it that's bothering you?"

"A policeman!" she wailed.

"But a very nice policeman. Now—what's the trouble?"

"Someone said something to me. Something nasty. Then he laughed. I thought it was you."

"He laughed?" Rennon said thoughtfully. He was remembering that explosive command, "*now!*" and the sinister laugh that followed. "Are you sure you *heard* him say it?"

"I thought I—what do you mean?"

"I'm not sure just what I do mean," Rennon said. "Except that I just had a similar experience. Maybe . . ."

His words were lost in the urgent shriek of brakes and a piercing scream. Rennon whirled and bounded towards the street. A white-faced motorist leaped from his car. Rennon met him over the crumpled body of a woman.

The motorist lifted his hands helplessly. "She jumped right in front of me!"

Rennon bent over the woman, and when he looked up the girl was standing beside him. "I'm a nurse," she said. "Could I . . ."

"Sure," Rennon said. "Take over. But I don't think she needs a nurse."

He strode angrily at the gathering crowd, forcing it back. A uniformed patrolman sprinted up, breathing heavily. A patrol car squealed to a stop. Rennon searched through the crowd looking for witnesses, and scribbled names and addresses. When he looked again at the victim, the girl was kneeling beside her on the pavement. She had the woman's arms neatly folded on her cheap cotton dress. From the distance came the high-pitched wail of an ambulance.

It ended quickly, with the ambulance driving away and the crowd thinning out. Rennon walked over to where the girl stood, looking sadly after the ambulance.

"May I have your name and address?" he said.

She turned frightened eyes on him. They were large, and deeply brown. Her hair was brown. Her nose had a most

amusing tilt. She wore no makeup, and Rennon told himself confidently that on her it looked good.

"I don't suppose it would do any good to say I'm sorry," she said.

He showed her the page of names in his notebook. "Witnesses," he said.

"But I didn't see . . ." She smiled, and gave him her name. He printed it carefully. Miss Sharon Wheeler. Nurses' Annex. Brinston Memorial Hospital. He thanked her, and walked away slowly. He was half a block down the street before he realized that he was going in the wrong direction. He'd forgotten where he'd left his car.

Thadbury Z. Wheeler, Chief of Detectives, usually worked with his office door open. It did not take an appointment to see Thadbury Wheeler. All it required was nerve.

Rennon walked in quietly, picked up a chair, and set it down by Wheeler's desk. He arranged himself in it, and had a cigarette lit by the time Wheeler looked up.

Wheeler's scowl ran in widening ripples up the high arch of his bald head. "What's on your mind?"

Rennon puffed deeply, and

aimed the smoke in the general direction of a half-opened window. Wheeler did not like smoke—any kind of smoke. He considered smoking a filthy, degenerate habit. Smoking in his presence required a long reach, because there were no ash trays in his office. The only suitable receptacle was a polished, chromium-plated cuspidor. Wheeler chewed tobacco.

"I don't know," Rennon said.

Wheeler got up abruptly, walked over to the door, and banged it shut. He returned to his chair and leaned forward, his massive hands folded over the stack of papers on his desk. "Give," he said.

"Do you know a good-looking girl named Sharon Wheeler?"

"Niece," Wheeler said.

"She doesn't look like you."

"That's a break for her. What's on your mind?"

Rennon grinned, and spoke carefully. "Being this day twenty-seven years of age, and of sound mind . . ." He looked up. "Am I of sound mind?"

"Lacking admissible evidence to the contrary . . ."

"Right," Rennon said. He leaned over and flicked his ashes into the cuspidor. "I've just been down to Traffic, go-

ing over some reports. Do you know how many pedestrians have recklessly flung themselves in front of cars in the last week?"

"Would it be inhumane of me to say I don't give a damn?"

"Do you know how many traffic accidents have occurred in the downtown area in the last week?"

Wheeler got out a plug of tobacco, and took a man-sized bite. "Ditto," he said. "If memory serves me correctly, you were supposed to be looking for the Penman. Five thousand dollars worth of phony checks in the last six months. Did you expect to find him down in Traffic?"

"That last lead was not the Penman," Rennon said. "Some guy bought a five-dollar tie clasp, and paid for it with a five-dollar check. The Penman does not write five-dollar checks. Anyway, he's probably in Los Angeles or Miami by now. He hasn't cashed a check for over a week."

Wheeler shrugged his bushy eyebrows, and chewed rhythmically. "You didn't come in here just to read me a traffic report. What is it?"

"Being this day twenty-seven years of age, of sound mind, and of reasonable in-

telligence . . ." Rennon hesitated, got no response, and went on, "I was standing on the corner of Main and High Streets waiting for the light to change, and I found myself thinking the world was a pretty lousy place and I might as well end it all. I caught myself just as I was about to dive under a bus. And I heard someone laughing at me. I heard him in my mind. It was a most unpleasant laugh."

Wheeler took aim, and rattled the cuspidor. "You've already used up this month's leave days."

"I backed away from the intersection to think things over," Rennon said. "And the next thing I knew your niece slapped my face. She has an excellent slap. She said she heard someone say something insulting to her, and I was the first man she saw, so she slapped me. She also heard a laugh. I didn't cross-examine her, but my guess is that she heard it in her mind, just as I did. Our conversation was interrupted by a woman throwing herself in front of a car. She was killed."

"Is that all?"

"That's all. Except for the traffic reports. They're interesting."

Wheeler leaned forward. "This is what I want you to do. Go back to the corner of Main and High Streets. This time, when you're about to dive under a bus, don't catch yourself."

Rennon got up. "Any objection to my looking into this in my spare time?"

"It's your time."

"Take a look at those traffic reports, will you?"

Wheeler gave him a long, questioning glance, and turned to his papers. "All right. I will."

Rennon moved the chair back against the wall and went out quickly, leaving the door open.

"I can't be positive about it," Sharon Wheeler said. "My experience was different from yours, you see."

"It came to you as thoughts belonging to someone else. It came to me as my own thoughts. Yes, that is a difference." Rennon set down his empty coffee cup, and signaled the waitress. "Even so, something weird is going on. The traffic statistics prove that."

He sat admiring Sharon while the waitress refilled their coffee cups. She was in her nurse's uniform, looking crisply professional. The

little restaurant was across the street from the hospital, and nurses and doctors seemed to be its principal patrons.

"What do you want to do?" Sharon asked.

"I have the names of some pedestrians who merely got hurt. Five of them are in your hospital. We might talk to them."

"We might. But it wouldn't do any harm to talk to Doctor Hilks, first. He's a resident psychiatrist, and he's sitting over there in the corner. Shall I call him over?"

The waitress delivered the message, and Doctor Hilks brought his coffee cup and joined them. He was a slender, middle-aged man with thick glasses and an awkwardly hidden bald spot. He nodded good-naturedly at Rennon, shook hands, and got himself settled on a wobbly chair.

He smiled indulgently when Rennon stated the problem, and he continued to smile as the facts were ticked off for him. He had his coffee cup refilled, he fussed impatiently with his watchfob, he polished his glasses, all the while eyeing Rennon with what the detective suspected was clinical curiosity.

"Hardly sufficient data to justify any kind of conclu-

sion," he said, when Rennon had finished. "The impulse to suicide is present to a degree in everyone. And I don't suppose it would be the first time that an attractive young lady has been insulted on Main Street."

"You aren't considering the upturn in traffic accidents," Rennon said.

"Any connection is purely speculative."

Rennon did not feel qualified to argue the point.

"Besides, you're postulating an impossibility. Telepathic communication is accepted by some scientists and vigorously denied by others. But even those who accept it don't claim that a telepath can transmit commands and insults—and laughs."

"What harm would it do to talk to the accident victims?"

"No harm," Doctor Hilks said. "But it won't be necessary. I've already talked to them. I've had several of them under hypnosis. I'm making a study of suicidal tendencies."

"You knew that?" Rennon said to Sharon.

"I knew Doctor Hilks had been seeing some of the accident victims."

"What did you find out?" he asked the doctor.

Hilks shrugged. "They all

have suicidal tendencies. Look—have you got a card?"

Rennon passed one over, and Doctor Hilks scribbled on it and passed it back. Rennon read, "Doctor Homer Wallace, Lincoln Hotel."

"I'd suggest that you discuss your problem with Doctor Wallace," Hilks said.

"Thank you," Rennon said. "I will."

They went together to see Doctor Wallace, because doing things together came quite naturally to them. Rennon telephoned to ask for an appointment, and the doctor's dry, wispy voice informed him that Doctor Wallace was retired, had been retired for twenty years, and would treat no patients under any circumstances unless an accident of fate placed a cerebral hemorrhage in the corridor outside his door. Rennon told him the matter was personal, not medical, and the doctor gave in reluctantly.

The doctor occupied a two-room suite on the fifteenth floor. The sitting room was small, but as he tartly reminded them, quite adequate for one man. The doctor was small. Rennon estimated his height at five-feet-six, and thought that any healthy scales would consider his

weight an insult. His face was grotesquely wrinkled, his few strands of hair were white. He was nearly ninety, and he looked his age.

Rennon described their experiences. The doctor pursed his lips, and allowed that it was interesting. Rennon mentioned the rising accident rate and Doctor Hilks's interviews with surviving victims. "He suggested that we see you," he said.

"Why?" Doctor Wallace wanted to know.

Rennon confessed that he did not know.

"I have discussed the matter with Hilks. He prates about suicidal tendencies. I consider him to be a fool."

"What is your explanation?" Rennon asked.

"There is no need to explain the obvious. We are dealing with thought transference on an unique level of effectiveness. Mental telepathy, if you like, removed from its normal status as unexplained and unproven phenomena. And you have reached the same conclusion, whether you realize it or not, or Hilks would not have sent you to me. He is having his little joke, you see, on all three of us, because he considers us candidates for his

services. Well—let him have his joke, and his suicidal tendencies. Investigation will prove otherwise. But it is a matter for scientific investigation, young man, not police investigation."

"People are being killed," Rennon said. "That's a matter for police investigation. At least in my book."

"Nonsense. What would the police say if I were to inform them that there is a mad telepath loose in this city? They would hold me for observation. Telepathy has been a life-long hobby of mine. Many times in the past I have found what I considered to be obvious manifestations of telepathic communication. My colleagues have castigated and derided me. They have accused me of unprofessional conduct. One hospital at which I was a staff doctor threatened me with dismissal. Now I have proof, all the proof I or anyone else could need, and what can I do? I'm too old for crusading. Do what you like, young man, but your problem is no business of mine."

"One more week like this last one," Rennon said, "and we'll have more traffic fatalities than we had in all of last year. If you have any information that might help,

it's your duty to step forward."

Doctor Wallace shook his head. "You can't catch a telepathic criminal. He could be anyone and he could be anywhere—a clerk in a store, someone walking along the street, a taxi driver, even one of your own policemen. If you did catch him, you could never prove he was the telepath. All he would have to do would be to stop transferring thoughts, and to all appearances he would be a perfectly normal citizen. If you could prove he was the telepath, you couldn't convict him. What law has he violated? There is no law against thinking, and there is no law against transference of thoughts to others. You'd better leave this to the scientists. The police won't be equipped to deal with a telepathic criminal until we have telepathic policemen."

"There must be something we can do. Will you come down and talk to my boss?"

"If he comes here, I'll talk to him," Doctor Wallace said. "A few more insults won't kill me."

Rennon arranged a meeting, and before it could take place it snowballed to include assorted police brass, two city councilmen, the mayor,

and various business and civic leaders. Rennon had to arrange for a room to hold the crowd, since Doctor Wallace's sitting room obviously wouldn't do. Then he had a twenty-minute argument on his hands to get Doctor Wallace to walk a few steps down the corridor and then to turn left.

The conversation spiraled around slowly, and reactions ranged from skepticism to derision. Rennon kept out of it. Doctor Wallace made it acidly clear that he did not expect to be believed, didn't particularly care if he wasn't, and didn't give a damn how many people were killed. He cited the experiences of the surviving accident victims, several of whom claimed to have heard the same laugh Sergeant Rennon described. Would Sergeant Rennon testify as to his experience? Sergeant Rennon did so, and sat down.

"It is not surprising that so few of the victims recognize the presence of an outside agent," Doctor Wallace said. "The recipient of a projected thought accepts it as his own thought. It is only when the telepath has been sufficiently amused to laugh that the victim becomes aware of the alien mentality.

At that moment it is usually too late."

Wheeler wanted to know if the doctor thought all the accidents were being caused by a telepath, and Doctor Wallace caustically reminded him that there had been accidents in the past without a telepath, and such accidents were probably continuing. The telepath should be blamed only for the number of accidents over and above normal experience. This, as the men from Traffic pointed out, was plenty.

Traffic also pointed out that the idea of a telepath wasn't any more idiotic than some of the other explanations they'd been considering. Wheeler asked two questions, of nobody in particular. Is this idea to be accepted, and if so, what do we do about it? No one volunteered an answer to either question, and the conversation started spiraling all over again.

"Rennon," Wheeler snapped, "stop biting your fingernails and tell us what's on your mind."

"It seems to me, sir," Rennon said, "that there are a number of steps which might help the situation. We can reduce the speed limit in the danger area to fifteen, and enforce it. We can make pe-

destrians stand back two feet from the curb when they're waiting to cross a street, and enforce that. We can spot first-aid stations around the downtown sector. Probably a number of stores would make space available. These things will make the public accident-conscious, and tend to prevent accidents—and get medical attention there fast when accidents do happen."

"All that enforcement will take a lot of men," Wheeler said.

"Yes, sir. And as long as we have all those men in the business section, they can have a shot at looking for a telepath."

Heads nodded. If there was a way to send men out looking for a telepath without admitting that one existed, the majority clearly approved.

Doctor Wallace's voice sounded over the rumble of conversation. "Supposing you catch this telepath—and you will notice I'm waiving the question of how you will know when you've caught him. Do you think locking him up would stop the accidents? He'll be able to project his thoughts from jail as well as from anywhere else."

"I'll worry about that after I catch him," Wheeler said.

One of the men from Traffic

brought the meeting to a close. "Let's get moving. Some fool pedestrian may be diving under a car this minute."

Rennon's ideas were put into effect, but without his active assistance. Wheeler caught him just as he was about to be assigned to patrol a stretch of Second Avenue, and booted him out of the room. "Your job," Wheeler said, "is to catch me a telepath. Get going."

Rennon spent a morning in Traffic, meticulously marking the locations of auto accidents and auto-pedestrian accidents on a large map of the downtown area. He tucked the map under his arm, and went over to the Lincoln Hotel to see Doctor Wallace.

The doctor was in a spry mood, perhaps as a result of the tentative acceptance by the city's leading citizens of the possibility of telepathy. He studied the map while Rennon talked.

"Brilliant," he said. "Absolutely brilliant. And absolutely impractical. You're assuming that the telepath reaches all his victims from the same spot, and that he is still there. Does that sound rational?"

"Perhaps not," Rennon said. "What I'd hoped was

that I could pick out some favorite locations. And then—we have to assume that he stations himself where he can see his victims, and that may be a wild guess, but at least it's a beginning."

Doctor Wallace tapped the map. "The fatal weakness in your scheme is that no one knows the effective range of mental telepathy. He may not be anywhere near his victims. He may be over in Bower-ville." The doctor chuckled. "As far as that goes, he might be on Mars. Who can tell?"

Rennon folded his map wearily. "Mars is outside my jurisdiction. Either we assume he's somewhere close by, or we give up. I have another idea. Since this started just over a week ago, I think it's possible that the telepath has just arrived here. I'm going to check hotel registers and rooming houses, to see who arrived about that time and is still here. And I might check those locations with my map."

"I have no faith in your map," the doctor said. "But I see nothing objectionable about the other approach. Whatever his station for projecting his thoughts, the telepath must sleep somewhere. And I note that the number

of night accidents has not increased."

"That's right."

"Yes. That type of investigation might be fruitful. I wish you luck, young man." He sat with his head tilted back, his eyes half-closed. "It would be an experience, after all these years, to meet a genuine telepath. I'm almost tempted to go down and walk around the streets, to see if he would contact me as he did you."

Rennon went downstairs, and crossed the street to Groseman's Department Store. Groseman's had donated space for a first-aid station near its main entrance. An interne and two nurses were on duty. One of the nurses was Sharon Wheeler.

"We haven't had a call since we set up here," she said. "I think it's actually working."

"Maybe he's just holding off until he gets a line on what we're doing."

Rennon stood by the entrance, looking out at the passersby. "It could be anyone of them," he thought. "Male or female."

An idea stabbed at him so suddenly that he reeled backwards. He sprang towards the first-aid station. "Second and

High Streets," he said. "There's been an accident."

The interne grabbed for his bag.

"Wait a minute," Rennon said. He slumped into a chair, and clutched at his head. "How did I know that? I couldn't see that intersection from here."

Then he heard the laugh.

Thadbury Wheeler charged into the store, and jerked Rennon to his feet. "Where the hell have you been?"

"Checking on accidents. There haven't been any."

"You didn't maybe stop to wonder *why* there haven't been any, did you? Too busy flirting with the nurses, I suppose."

"Uncle Thad!" Sharon exclaimed. "That's not fair. He's been . . ."

"I know what he's been doing. How do I know? This telepath slipped the word to me. Sergeant Rennon's over at Groseman's aid station flirting with a nurse. That's why there haven't been any accidents. The telepath is too busy driving the force nuts to bother the pedestrians. He slipped someone an idea that a shoe-store clerk is the telepath, and we wasted half an hour. Ten men dropped out of sight, and I found them all down at the depot. The tele-

path slipped the idea that he was departing on the two-o'clock train. I say if he's departing, let him go. He even sent me chasing over to the Roosevelt Hotel. I was knocking on the door of room 517 before I realized what an ass I was making of myself. Fortunately, no one was in. He's driving me crazy!"

"Even so," Rennon said, "it's better than people getting killed."

"He slips us something good now and then. Like an hour ago, when he put two of the boys onto a pickpocket. And like when he let me know my star detective was in here flirting with my niece. Sometimes he knocks off, too, and we don't hear from him for twenty, thirty minutes. But he comes back stronger than ever. Come along, now, and earn your pay."

They went out to the curb, where Wheeler's car stood. A patrol car came screaming around the corner, and roared away down Main Street. Wheeler said to his driver, "Find out where they're going."

The driver grabbed the radio. A block away, the patrol car slowed, and pulled over.

"They've decided they don't know," the driver said.

Wheeler said explosively, "Nuts!"

He climbed into the back seat, and Rennon got in beside him. Gloomily they listened to the radio—a chaos of conflicting reports, false leads, and frantic dashes to non-existent accidents.

Suddenly Rennon started, and looked at Wheeler.

"Did you get that?" Wheeler said. "Four-car smash at Third and Elm?"

"I got it. I heard the laugh, too."

"See if there's a car near there," Wheeler said to the driver. "We don't dare ignore it."

The driver got on the radio. Wheeler straightened up again. "Rooming house at 1192 South River. Room Five."

The driver nodded. "Roosevelt Hotel," Rennon said. "Room 517."

"Skip that," Wheeler snapped. "I've been there."

They stared at each other.

"All right," Wheeler said. "Send it out. Maybe someone's home, now."

Another patrol car went tearing past. Wheeler shrugged, and let it go. "I'm going to resign," he muttered. "I couldn't stand another day of this."

Rennon said nothing. The thought had reached him quite clearly that the telepath was hiding in the band shell in Riverside Park. He kept it to himself.

"We're licked," Wheeler muttered. "We wouldn't know him if we saw him. All he'd have to do would be keep his thoughts to himself. We might as well go back to headquarters."

The driver nodded, and turned the ignition key.

Suddenly Rennon leaped for the door. The thought he'd had was unlike all other thoughts, terrifying in its urgency. "Lincoln Hotel, 1548. Help! Please help!"

"Did you get that?" he called, but Wheeler was out on the other side, and starting across the street. Rennon dodged traffic and followed him. A patrol car swung to the curb as they reached the other side. Two uniformed officers came hurrying down the street. The siren of another patrol car sounded in the distance. Rennon looked back, and saw the interne and the two nurses come hurrying out of Groseman's. He ran after Wheeler, and caught him at the elevator.

Two detectives were there ahead of them. They smashed the door just as the hotel

manager came into sight waving a key. Rennon bounded across the empty room, and opened a door. He was into the bedroom beyond before he realized where he was.

It was Doctor Wallace's suite.

The doctor lay on the floor. The small body seemed shriveled and insignificant, but the face was a mask of fierce triumph. Wheeler bent over him, and shook his head.

Rennon turned to the window. A telescope stood on a tripod, pointing downwards. Rennon went back to the sitting room, sat down at the desk, and got out his map. He marked the location of the Lincoln Hotel, and began checking off the accident locations.

Wheeler bent over his shoulder. "Heart attack," he said. "Too much excitement."

"It figures," Rennon said.

"When the medical detachment clears out, we'll use that telescope. I'll give odds we can see ninety-five per cent of the places. This thing is so obvious we almost booted it. Only one telepathy expert in town, and him a dedicated fanatic. Probably he's been telling himself all his life that some day he'd show people. Probably he's been using that

telescope for years, looking at the people down on the street, and thinking evil thoughts at them. And then one day last week—say, is this thing possible? It hardly seems so."

"He started showing them," Rennon said. "The wrong way."

Rennon handed Wheeler the map, and led Sharon Wheeler out of the way while the body was being removed. "He seemed like a fine old man," she said. "A crank, maybe, but a crank with character. What do you think went wrong?"

"He had the wrong kind of character."

"Whatever he was," Wheeler said, "I'm glad this is over with."

Rennon, standing with his arm around Sharon Wheeler, felt a lurking, shivering uncertainty. It had happened before, and it would go on happening—pedestrians foolishly stepping into traffic, drivers doing idiotic things. And now, whenever it happened, he would be wondering.

"I guess Doctor Wallace has the last laugh," he said. "We'll never know for sure."

"Nuts," Wheeler said. "Of course it was Wallace. This will prove he's the one."

"The *only* one?" Rennon said.

Wheeler pushed the map aside, and reached for a chew of tobacco. For the first time in Rennon's memory, he had nothing to say. **THE END**

SUICIDE WORLD

(Continued from page 43)

fanatic, as Jay Stelmack had been. He found, now, that he had time for all manner of things. Time to enjoy the money that had been left him, without trying to impress everyone he was not an idle playboy. Time to work at other things, and to enjoy the company of a girl.

There was time now.

Time for good things.

It had been bad for a terribly long while, but that was ended now. The madness might go on for a spell, for man was still man, and nothing could change that. But the scare had been a big one, and the world had grown smaller.

It would grow smaller yet, before it learned to live with itself.

As time was spent, the Earth licked its wounds. And healed slowly. Far slower than the memory of the men who had wounded it. **THE END**

DARK MENACE

By J. ANTHONY FERLAINE

ILLUSTRATOR VEGH

*An unidentified terror stalked the dark countryside
and it was difficult for an old man in a wheel chair
to tell one monster from another.*

I STRAINED my head towards the sound and listened. There was no doubt about it. Some one or *something* was coming down the road.

I was scared. Scared stiff. Who could be walking down the road at this time of night? The farmhouse was eight miles from nowhere, and the road itself led to nowhere. Nowhere that anyone would want to go, that is, except perhaps another farmer. And the farmers that I knew all drove trucks.

No, this was a stranger. And a stranger could only mean one thing to an old man alone in the house at night. Trouble. The light shining out from the kitchen window could reveal me sitting there in the rocking chair on the

porch. Reveal me to the stranger standing out there in the dark. There was a shotgun in the barn where Roy always kept it, but I knew I'd never make it over to the barn in time.

Roy hadn't wanted to go off and leave me by myself for five days. I had insisted that he go—that I'd get along just swell with old Katy taking care of me in the daytime.

"It just ain't right, dad," he had said. "This old leg of mine will be all right doctors or no doctors. And you can't live here by yourself for a week with nobody but old Katy bringing you your grub. Besides, I don't know about this Katy of yours. I never did meet her you know. She always seems to be around when I'm out in the fields."



What nameless terror waited in the night?

"Now, don't you go carrying on about old Katy, Roy," I had said. "She's a good cook and that's what counts. Me, and her will get along just fine. You go off and get your leg fixed up, and don't come home until you're better."

So Roy had gone off to the city to get his leg worked on and here I was on the porch with a stranger walking towards me in the dark.

The footsteps paused at the mail box and then started slowly again up the walk towards the porch. I leaned forward and peered into the blackness. There was something terribly odd about the footsteps. They were methodical, almost painful . . . as if their owner had his leg in a cast or was dragging a heavy sack of some sort.

"Who's there?" I said, harshly. "Don't take another step forward! I have a gun here in my lap and I'm not afraid to use it."

The dragging footsteps stopped about fifteen feet away from me.

"Speak up"! I said, making a quick waving motion with my pipe.

"Hello," said the stranger. "Don't be alarmed. I wish you no harm. I come in peace."

"Decent folk don't go walk-

ing around these parts after dark." I said. "What do you want?"

"I had an accident, I've been hurt. I need help."

"Come up on the porch and stand over there by the doorway," I said. "If you need help I'll give it to you, but don't make any funny moves. I'm not taking chances."

The footsteps dragged up the steps and stopped in front of me. I could hear him breathing with a sort of pinched up wheeze.

"Go into the kitchen. There's some iodine and bandages and stuff in the cabinet over the sink."

"Do you think I'm ugly?" said the stranger, without moving.

"Ugly as sin," I said. "Now get in the kitchen and hurry it up."

He paused for a bit and then opened the screen door and went in.

"If you've come to rob me," I said, "Forget it. There's no money in there, or anywhere else around the house for that matter. We're poor people! And another thing—my son will be back from town any minute now and he *don't* like strangers."

"Your money is of no value to me," said the stranger from the kitchen. "No value at all."

I do not wish to rob you. As I said before, I come in peace."

Some of these city people talked like they had just learned the English language, I thought. And why had he asked if I thought that he was ugly? Had he guessed the truth?

The screen door squeaked open and he came out again. I looked towards the door and asked him if he got himself fixed up.

"I'll be all right!" he said, *from the opposite side of the porch!*

I swung around. He had slammed the door and then moved quietly to the porch railing. I had been tricked! *He knew!*

"You can't see me, can you?" he said quietly, "You're blind!"

"Yes," I said, "I'm blind."

"Do not be afraid," he said, "I do not wish to harm you. We should get along well. I am ugly and you are blind. The blind cannot see the ugliness and the ugly need not be self conscious."

"Just what is it that you want?"

"I told you, I had an accident. My vehicle hit a tree. I was wondering if I could impose on your hospitality and stay for the night. I could sleep in the barn?"

"There's a spare bed in there," I said. "You can use it if you like."

"Thank you," he said. "That is very kind of you. Which room is it?"

"On the left, at the end of the hall."

"Thank you," he said again, and with that he turned and went through the screen door into the kitchen. I heard him go down the hall and into the back bedroom.

I sat out on the porch for a while thinking about what I could do if he intended to harm me. Finally I decided that I couldn't do anything, so, I went on in and went to bed, locking the door behind me.

The next morning I woke up, surprised that I hadn't laid awake all night worrying about the stranger in the next room. I was lying there wondering if I should get up and unlock the door when I heard Katy outside.

"Com'on, get up, sleepy-head," she hollered through the door. "It's almost eight o'clock. What are you going to do . . . sleep all day?"

I put on my pants and unlocked the door. Katy was in the kitchen singing *Flat-Foot Floogie* at the top of her voice. I hesitated by the other bed-

room door for a second and then went on into the kitchen. I could smell the eggs and bacon cooking and the coffee perking on the stove.

"What's the matter, honey?" said Katy. "You out havin' a gay time last night? Got a big head this morning?"

"Katy," I said, "There's a man . . . a stranger in the back bedroom."

A spoon clattered to the floor. "A stranger!" she squeaked, and I heard her go past me and stand in the doorway, evidently looking down the hall.

"Lock that door," I said, "and then go out to the barn and fetch me the gun. Bring it in here to me and then go across the meadow to Jess Compton's place and tell him to come over here."

Katy went out through the kitchen door. I sat down by the table and waited.

Several minutes later the screen door banged open again and she was back.

"There's nobody in that back room," she said. "The bed's not even mussed up. I looked in the window from the outside. There's nobody there."

"I'll be doggoned," I said. "I guess he was on the level after all. All he wanted was a place to sleep."

"You sure you weren't dreamin' honey? It don't make no sense for a man to get up and leave without stoppin' for breakfast."

"Bashful I guess," I said. "He said he was ugly. Maybe he figured he'd just shove off before anybody got a look at him."

"Ugly was he," said Katy. "He should have stuck around. Me and him would have made a great pair."

"Why do you keep running yourself down all the time, Katy? Why I'll bet you're a real looker. Let me touch your face, Katy. I want to see with my hands."

"No you don't!"

"I read a story once where a blind man did that with a girl and when he got his sight back he thought that ugliness was beauty."

"I still remember what beauty looks like," I said, "and I'm not about to get my sight back. How about some breakfast?"

I walked over and sat down at the kitchen table. Katy put the eggs and bacon in front of me where I could feel for them. Eating eggs and bacon without being able to see them is not as difficult as you might imagine. I had been totally blind for the past ten years

and I had been feeding myself almost from the beginning.

After breakfast I went out on the porch to sit a bit and smoke my pipe. Katy tidied up the dishes and then followed me outside.

"Read me the paper a bit, before you go, will you Katy?" I said. I was just talking to be talking. I knew that she had the paper under her arm; I could hear it rustle when she walked.

"Here's one," said Katy, after she had read awhile, "happened right around here too."

"Fiery green ball lights up sky near Dansburg. Hundreds see glowing sphere for several minutes."

"What did they say it was?" I asked.

"They don't know," said Katy, "The scientists say it was probably a meteor, except that meteors are not usually green. Besides that, most of the people who saw it say that it went up and down and backwards and forwards."

I laughed. "I'll bet those scientific boys are hard put to explain a meteor that flies around like a helicopter."

"Here's some more," said Katy. "A man and his wife claim that they saw a strange

aircraft crash in a water-filled stone quarry near Hinton."

"Does it mention their name?" I said. "That stone quarry is not too far from here. Seven or eight miles maybe. That could be the Larson's that they're talking about?"

"That's right," said Katy. "That's who it is. Mr. James Larson and his wife Nora Jean. You know them well?"

"Well enough to know that if Jim Larson says he saw a ship crash, he saw one crash," I said. "Trouble is, nobody'll believe him and that space ship will just lay there under forty feet of water until it rots."

"Space Ship!" said Katy. "Who said that it was a space ship?"

"I did! It couldn't be a meteor. That's pretty obvious from all the other eye witness reports. So what else could it be? It had to be a space ship!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it does say here that some responsible scientists believe the green spheres are extraterrestrial (whatever that is) visitors from *outer space*," said Katy.

"Darn right," I said, "that was a space ship those people saw. And if anybody would take the trouble to look they'd find one at the bottom of that stone quarry."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because Roy saw one with his own two eyes right here *on this farm* not over a month ago."

"Roy, your son? You mean he saw one? Right here? Why didn't he tell someone?"

"He did, but nobody'd believe him. I did though. Roy just wouldn't lie to me. He saw one all right!"

"What happened to it after he saw it?"

"It took off again while Roy was running up to the house to tell me. He thinks they had engine trouble or something and had to land."

"If Roy saw a real space ship they didn't have engine trouble," said Katy.

"Why not?"

"If they could build a ship to fly from some other planet they wouldn't be likely to have engine trouble. If they landed it must have been for a purpose!"

"A purpose! What purpose could they have?"

"Well, they might want to look around a bit to make some tests, or maybe to let off one of their people."

"A spy?"

"Could be. Could also be they wanted a first hand look-see."

"Wait a minute!" I said. "I just remember something.

Roy said that he thought he saw something by the edge of the cornpatch as the ship went up. He went after it with the shotgun, but he couldn't find anything. He decided later that he must have been mistaken."

Katy rustled the paper and stood up.

"I swan!" she said. "Here I am sitting here talking about a lot of scientific fiddle faddle with you and neither of us know what we are talking about. I've got to go in the house and get this place tidied up."

"But don't you see?" I said, standing up. "That space ship in the quarry . . . One of them might have escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Sure! That fellow last night . . . he was acting mighty strange. Talked funny and walked funny. It could have been him."

Katy laughed. "Good' Gracious, if it was him why didn't he hide out at the Larson place instead of walking all the way over here?"

"Because he was hurt, that's why. Probably figured that they'd be looking for him at the scene of the crash?"

"Well, it's a cinch it ain't no use speculating about it now," said Katy. "He's gone."

I fumbled for some matches and relit my pipe. Katy let the screen door close as she walked inside.

"He must be around somewhere," I said to myself, "Either dead or alive."

Katy came out ready to leave about ten minutes later. It was the same every day.

"See you at lunch time," she said.

"Katy, stay all day with me just this once," I said. "I've got a hunch that fellow is still around here someplace."

"Now don't you go getting childish ideas in your old age," said Katy. "Besides I've got work of my own to do."

I sighed and fell back into my rocker.

"Get on with you," I said. "Just put that shotgun here on the floor beside me."

Katy handed me the gun and walked down the steps. I fingered the catch on the old double barrel and felt the edge of the shells, then I lowered the gun to the floor and put my head back on the pillow.

I must have dozed off. A voice was talking to me from somewhere.

. Then I was awake.

"I said, I'm sorry that I slipped out on you so unobtrusively. I heard your maid coming and became panicky."

"So you're back!" I said, reaching towards the gun.

"You can shoot me if you wish," said the voice. "It would be better that way, perhaps."

"I don't aim to shoot unless I have to," I said. "Who are you, and where are you from?"

"Spencer Jones, presently from New York City, New York and originally from Framingham, Massachusetts.

"Jones, eh!" I said. "No, that's an odd one isn't it?"

"Why no," said Jones, "As a matter of fact, it's rather quite. . ."

"OK! OK! So it's Jones," I said. "What are you doing around here?"

"Well, it's kind of an involved story," said Jones. "I think it would suffice to say that I'm running away from a girl who wishes to marry me and a father with too much money. This country looked like a secluded spot and I decided to stay. The only thing is I ran into a tree back the road a piece, I guess I had a bit too much to drink."

"So why don't you get moving. Why are you hanging around me?"

"Well, in the first place, I no longer have an automobile and secondly I like it here."

"You mean you want to stay with me?"

"Why yes, if you will have me."

"What do you look like?" I said suspiciously.

"Well, I'm thirty-five — I suppose I look about forty. Five feet eleven inches tall. Sort of lean you might say. My hair is black and my nose is crooked. I have protruding teeth. I'm an ugly man. The girl was after my father's money. That's about it except for the gash in my left knee. I'm still limping a little, but I don't think it's serious.

"Hah," I said. "I'll bet!"

"What do you mean?"

I picked up the gun and propped it in my lap.

"I think you're a creature!"

"We're all God's creatures."

"I mean a Creature from another planet!"

He gasped. I picked up the gun and pointed it toward the sound.

"A hideous monster — too horrible to behold."

There was no sound for a moment or two. I jerked the weapon around waiting for a telltale clue.

"You're mad?"

I laughed, pointing the gun at him. "Mad am I. Now you march into the kitchen and stay there. The door into the

dining room is locked and both windows will creak like hell if you try to raise 'em. If I hear a sound at any one of the doors or windows I'll cut loose with the shotgun. And don't think that I'll miss . . . because I won't.

"How long do you intend to keep me here?" he said, after he was inside.

"Walk around in the kitchen so I can tell you're really in there."

"How long do you intend to keep me here?" he said again.

"Until Katy gets here," I said.

"A woman?"

"Yes, but don't get so happy about it. My son Roy is due home this afternoon."

I relaxed a little and waited. He shuffled around a bit in the kitchen and then was still. He was obviously sitting down.

"It must be 11:00 o'clock," I thought. Katy should be back in about an hour. Roy might get in anytime between twelve and four. If Roy didn't show up, I'd have to hold the fort until Katy ran across the meadow to Jess Compton's place and get some help."

The stranger or creature, or whatever he was, got up again and started walking around. I hoisted the gun in my lap.

"What do you really look like?" I asked.

He walked over and touched the screen on the door, I could hear him breathing about four feet away.

"Ugly as sin!" he said finally. He paused. "Ugly to Earthlings, that is—not to my own kind."

"Do you have two legs and two arms?" I asked.

"Oh yes—I've got the full compliment of appendages except that they are covered with scales instead of skin."

I shuddered.

"Why do you shudder?" Your skin is really made up of minute scales you know!"

"What does your head look like? I asked. "Do you have scales on your face too?"

"Scales on my face. Scales on my head. Scales all over my body—even my toes. Oh, I'm quite a monster. Pointed ears—bulging red eyes—Fangs for teeth and two small tentacles growing out of my forehead. These are used to communicate without the spoken word. In fact I can read your mind—*right now!*"

I flopped back in the rocker and raised the gun, as if he were advancing on me. If he could read my mind, he could probably outwit me. Maybe even make me think things I didn't want to think.

I waited tensely with the

gun in readiness. About twenty minutes later I heard the distant voice of Katy, coming across the meadow. She was still singing *Flat-Foot Floogie*.

When she reached the gate I called softly to her: "Katy come up on the porch and take the gun. Point it at the kitchen door."

She came up in the porch and took the gun. There was a hiss inside. I heard Katy gulp.

The next thing I knew the screen door banged open and Katy charged inside.

I never in my life heard a tussel like I heard that day. Grunts, groans, screams, and furniture being thrown about. Some of the curses were in English and others were in a language that I had never heard before.

It must have lasted ten minutes or more, and then there was a shot. And then another. All was quiet except for labored breathing in the kitchen. Suddenly I heard Roy's truck at the driveway. I heard the door slam and him running up to the house.

He paused for a second on the porch and then opened the kitchen door.

"Oh, my God!" he said.

"What happened? What happened? Roy for heaven's sake tell me what happened. Is the monster dead?"

"It's dead all right!" said Roy, "deader'n a mackeral. Com'on Pop I'm taking you over to the Comptons."

"Is it ugly?" I said.

"So ugly it almost turns your stomach."

Roy picked me up and headed towards the truck.

"How about Katy?" I cried, "is she all right?"

Before he could answer a loud voice called out from the direction of the barn. I recognized it as Jess Compton's voice.

"Heard the shot!" he called as he came closer. "I called the sheriff. What's going on over here?"

"There's no time to explain now," Roy said. "There's a creature from another planet in there. It's dead. Go in and get the human that's with it and do what you can till the sheriff gets here. I'm taking Pop over to your place. He's about done in."

"A creature—from another planet?" said Jess, "I don't understand, I—"

"Move!" said Roy as he put me in the pick-up.

A minute later we were bouncing down the road to the Compton's place.

"You all right Dad?" said Roy.

"Oh, I'm OK, son. But how about poor Katy? Is *she* all right?"

"Dad, I never knew Katy. Remember—?"

"I mean the woman on the floor in there with the monster. Is she all right?"

"Dad, there was no woman in there!"

"No woman?"

"No woman Dad. There was a man in there, badly cut up. I think he said his name was Jones."

"Jones?" You mean there really was a man named Jones?"

I could feel Roy shaking his head.

"Yes, Dad."

"If Jones was real, then Katy must have been a—"

"Yes, dad," he said quietly, "your Katy was a monster."

THE END

FIGUREX

By PAUL DALLAS

The machine was only a complicated mass of metal. It couldn't possibly have feelings or emotions. Or could it?

THE point I make, Prop-whistle," said C. Spencer Bennet, "is that accuracy is the heart and soul of the business. Correct?"

"Propington, sir," Ernie offered timidly. The Old Man was clearly off on a lecture and this was no time to quibble, but after all, a man's name was important.

"What? Ah yes, exactly." Bennet seemed pleased that his employee had known his own name. He beamed. "No one," he said expansively, "holds greater store by devotion to duty than I. And yet . . ." He leaned back against the protesting springs of his swivel chair as he surveyed the thin man who sat opposite him. He blew a neat cloud of smoke across the desk. Ernie Propington blink-

ed, and his eyes watered a little, but he peered steadily at the Old Man through the fog.

"And yet," Bennet continued, "there is such a thing as overdoing it. Correct?"

He was correct and he knew it. Ernie didn't answer him.

"Yes, indeed, you can get so close to the trees that you don't see the bushes, if you follow me. That, my boy, is the spot you're in. Precisely."

Ernie shifted in his seat and clasped his hands nervously. These were very trying episodes for him and they made him uncomfortable. As a member of the staff of the C. Spencer Bennet Research Company, he had been through several of these pri-

vate lectures. But he wasn't like the others—he always tried to comprehend them. His co-workers just didn't take them seriously, and Ernie couldn't understand that, because there was very little which he didn't take seriously. He was far from a prude, in his own judgment, but the frivolous things lacked meaning for him. As was usual, however, he felt the sense of the interview slipping away from him. He tried a recovery.

"I'm close to the trees?" he ventured.

"Ah, then you've spotted it too!" Bennet leaned forward suddenly and slapped the desk hard. Ernie jumped involuntarily and clasped his hands tighter.

"Good boy." Bennet was smiling broadly. "That's the first step. Now then, let us sum up your problem in one word."

He paused, waiting to hear the one word. Ernie squirmed, and his eyebrows raised in dismay. Since he wasn't following the Old Man at all, he knew he would never come up with the right answer. Various words flashed through his mind in desperation—cat, dog, horse, cow? He discarded animals; they were obviously

not what Bennet wanted. Onyx, he thought, obsidian. What was the word for two-toed sloth that always appeared in the crosswords? Then he had an inspiration.

"Bushes," he screamed, and was immediately ashamed of himself. Bennet had recoiled from the shout, and a momentary expression of fear shadowed his features, but he soon regained his composure and smiled again, understandingly.

"I think you can see what I mean," he said. "Your nerves, boy. Tight as a drum. The word we are looking for is," he leaned back and paused for dramatic effect, "overwork!"

Ernie was stunned. Nothing could have been further from his thoughts. He pulled himself together and mentally berated himself for not having thought of so simple a word. There was nothing to it, really. Overwork. He could have said it easily, instead of shouting "bushes" at the boss and making a fool of himself. The only thing was that he didn't see at all how it tied in. His lips formed the word. "Overwork," he said softly, practicing in case another chance should occur.

"Exactly," Bennet agreed. "And it's been affecting the

results. You've been off every time. As your estimates go higher and higher the deaths keep dropping off. Correct?"

Ernie nodded unhappily. It was true. He was supposed to figure the death rate that could be expected from forthcoming holidays. He had access to statistics from all over the country on every conceivable contributing factor and he had, moreover, the thing that had brought meaning into his life. The one thing which made waking up each morning a pleasure, that made him look forward to an early arrival at work each day: Ernie was in complete charge of the Figurex, that marvelous electronic computer whose heart and brain were made of transistors and wires and whose soul was fed into it every day by the loving hands of its operator. It was the very latest model, far in advance of anything that had preceded it. The manufacturers of the Figurex always referred to it, in their sales correspondence, as "she," claiming that it had the heart and calculating mind of the modern woman.

Only, it hadn't been giving correct results. Maybe the fault lay with the machine—but Ernie preferred to think

that the defect was his. After all, even the Figurex was dependent on what was fed it. It didn't just dream up its forecast. So Ernie had checked and rechecked his figures and, finding nothing which needed correcting, he had spent long hours analyzing and testing his beloved Figurex. Nothing was wrong here either; nothing, that is, except the results.

"Now, then," Bennet returned to the lecture, "we must decide what the weak spot is, the defective link in the chain, as it were. What answer do we find?"

Ernie searched the man's eyes for the answer and found none. Left to his own, he blurted, "The people!"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand." Bennet had been thrown off stride and he was becoming a little impatient. Why was it, he wondered, that so few people could follow a line of reasoning through to its logical end.

"Yes, sir," Ernie said. "I'm using the right figures, and I'm using them in a larger quantity than ever before. Figurex is in perfect shape—I know, 'cause I check it regularly. The only thing, as I see it, is that the people must be wrong. Seven hundred and fifty *should* have died last

weekend, but they just didn't." He brightened a bit, warmed by the logic of his discovery. "Do you think, sir, maybe a campaign aimed at public education?"

A look of vast disbelief came to Bennet's face. "Do you mean to teach them to kill themselves?"

"Well, not exactly," Ernie replied weakly. That was the trouble with big men; they could make even the most reasonable ideas sound downright silly. "I just thought, maybe to keep the actual results more in line with . . ." He tapered into silence.

Bennet filled his huge chest with air several times and then took a deep pull on his cigar. It settled him. He smiled.

"No, my boy," he said pleasantly, "we'll have to look for the answer much closer to ourselves."

"You, sir?" It was Ernie's turn to be incredulous.

Bennet gasped and crushed out his half-smoked cigar. He ground it viciously for a few minutes and took a tighter hold on his patience.

"Look," he said then, talking rapidly, squeezing the words against each other so that nothing might hinder his getting the idea across. "You

are overworked. You're so damn close to your machine and your stupid statistics that you can't tell up from down, and you need a change, and you're going to get it this weekend. Tomorrow morning you and I are going fishing. Up to my cabin. Fresh air, trees. Birds, dammit. You'll come back a different man and it'll show in your work. Do I make myself clear?" He was glaring fiercely at the young man, who was thoroughly cowed.

Ernie thought he understood. But sometimes it was hard to be sure. It was not a thing to take chances with, however, since few things affected him so poisonously as outdoor life. He felt ill without a surrounding of good solid buildings tall enough to push the sky away. It just wasn't for him.

"Oh, Mr. Bennet," he said, as soon as he was certain that he had made no mistake, "I couldn't possibly go fishing with you."

"Nonsense, my boy," the hearty man replied. "Of course you can."

Ernie paled. Something in the voice and manner of the boss told him he was resisting in a hopeless cause. Gallantly, he tried again. "But . . ."

The upraised hand and the

miasma of smoke from a freshly lit cigar halted him.

"My car's out of town. Wife's visiting, you know. So pick me up in yours tomorrow morning. Eight o'clock, shall we say?"

"Yes, but . . ." Ernie was routed.

"No buts, Propwinkle," Bennet said, jovially but firmly. "It's all in the interest of accuracy. The heart and soul of the business, remember."

"Propington, sir," Ernie murmured unhappily; after all, a man's name was important.

They were about a half-hour out of the city, and Bennet had been doing all the talking. He spoke of the need for a man to return to the primitive from time to time. The joys of the chase, the natural urge to provide food through cunning and the skill of his own two hands. The invigorating charge of the elements in the raw.

At first this conversation revolted Ernie; it merely served to accentuate the mental picture he had of himself spending the weekend with his hands covered, up to the elbows, with blood. A sort of degenerate butcher who ran wildly about the countryside bellowing "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

He shuddered in agony and his moist palms took a firmer grip on the wheel. Fortunately, though, the Saturday traffic out of town grew formidable and, pressing him from behind and squeezing him from the sides, it forced him to give most of his attention to the parkway. He drove, or was driven, faster than he liked, and soon the blatherings of his boss formed a meaningless background to the sound of the heavy traffic.

Bennet was happy. It was just one of those days when, as he remarked to himself, he could fall into the creek at low tide and come up smelling of bonded bourbon. His wife was out of town, he was doing the lad a magnificently benevolent kindness (the sort which could be casually reported to the Lodge) and he was on his way to the cabin. It was the kind of day, in short, on which the big ones bit. Also, there'd be no trouble with gathering firewood or washing up afterwards. The young fellow had to learn these things, too—do him good.

He had just reached into his breast pocket and extracted a cigar, when the car swerved violently and crabbed sideways against the stream of traffic. They lurched over the low curb and came to rest

on the grassy strip to the right of the parkway.

Bennet looked sharply at his employee.

"Blast it!" he said. "You shouldn't do that unless you're in a tank! What happened? Flat?"

Ernie was staring straight ahead, pale and shaken; his hands still clutched the wheel. "I never turned it off!" he said, in a shocked tone.

"Well, in heaven's name, turn it off and let's get the spare on," Bennet exploded, pointing to the ignition key. He was beginning to believe that he had made a mistake in trying to be a father to this impossible boy.

"It's not the tires, sir," Ernie explained miserably. "It's the Figurex. I didn't turn it off last night, and it will be running all weekend, and you know it shouldn't."

Bennet smiled with relief. The day could be salvaged after all.

"Let's get this straight," he said. "We're here to forget all about the silly machine. Get it? It just doesn't count. And anyway, it's meant for continuous operation, so a little extra running time won't hurt it."

"It's not only that, sir . . ." Ernie began, but Bennet wouldn't let him finish.

"Well, for Pete's sake, then, what is it?"

Ernie stared silently ahead but didn't say anything, and Bennet became alarmed. What was the boy hiding?

"Out with it, man; what are you trying to say?"

Ernie swallowed with difficulty. "It's just that, well, I hate to think of it running, and all, when it's alone and nobody's with it."

"You *what!*" The cigar was chewed through and had to be discarded.

"I mean, Mr. Bennet, that there it is, running on and on, waiting for someone to give it some figures, and . . ."

Bennet's voice carried a pleading tone — almost a whine. "Look, boy," he said placatingly, "if anything happens to that machine, I'll see that there's a replacement in before noon on Monday. But just for today and tomorrow, let's not mention the thing again. Let's just think about fish. Beautiful, fat fish. Is it a deal?" He smiled heartily and extended his hand to seal the bargain.

Before Ernie could answer, a loud crash assailed their ears; then another and another one. The sharp screech of tires pierced the heavier noise of steel against steel,

and the tinkle of glass sounded musically through the hideous din. At once, horns started blowing in a chorus of protest, and the two men in the parked car saw that a few hundred yards ahead a dreadful tangle of cars marked the spot where the accident had occurred.

"Jeez!" Bennet breathed. "There must be ten of them wrapped up in that one."

Ernie said nothing. This was the sort of thing he regarded as the inevitable result of leaving the shelter of the city. He was sympathetic, but not surprised.

Bennet, however, was shaken. As he tried to make up his mind whether he should run ahead on foot to lend assistance, a State Trooper's car, red light flashing and siren howling, proceeded awkwardly along the grass dividing strip between the two lanes. The Trooper was steering with one hand and with the other he clutched a microphone close to his lips.

Bennet felt it would be wiser to leave things in the capable hands of the officials. He was not altogether sure that his legs would support him. He was a highly imaginative man, in certain fields, and the picture of himself lying mangled and bleeding in

one of the damaged cars was terrifying. And it could so easily have happened. If Propwhimper, in fact, had not got off the road just when he did . . . it took Bennet several minutes to get back his wind.

Finally he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face thoroughly. Another trooper had joined the first, and between them they were administering first-aid, while they had managed to open one lane so that those cars which could move could crawl past the wreckage.

"That machine saved our lives," he whispered.

"I beg your pardon?" Ernie said. Ambulances were coming up, and their sirens made it difficult to hear.

"In a manner of speaking," Bennet explained hastily. "I mean, if you hadn't suddenly remembered it and turned off when you did, we'd be right in the middle of that mess."

Ernie nodded. He waited for Bennet to indicate what they should do now.

The boss was pondering the situation. He wavered momentarily while thinking that the Figurex had saved the day and the idea, which was becoming more prominent with every passing second, that

Propwinter had irretrievably jinxed it. He made up his mind and resigned himself.

"Let us," he said, "forget about fishing. Let us go home. Drop me off at the house, and then you can go downtown and turn off your machine. If you wish, you may spend the weekend with it."

"Thank you, sir," Ernie said happily. Bennet looked at him sharply but could see no trace of humor in his face. He sighed and fixed his gaze out the window as Ernie started the car and fed it slowly into the stream of traffic.

The office was quiet and dark after the glare in the streets. Ernie walked through the empty rooms toward the Figurex. It was something like the feeling that existed in the early morning—but in a way it was different. He knew that there would be no interruption today; no one would be bothering him. It was nice to feel that there was no schedule of operations to be followed, and he was determined to spend as much time as necessary shining and buffing the exterior of his calculator to make up to it for the distressing experience of running alone and untended for almost twenty hours. He got the polishing cloth from the lower drawer of his desk

and walked over to the Figurex. He didn't shut it off immediately, because he felt that now that he was there it would prefer to have some company.

As Ernie ran the cloth gently over its surface (lightly, so that the dust wouldn't scratch it) he turned the whole matter over in his mind. It was not impossible that the machine had actually called out to him today. After all, even Mr. Bennet had conceded that it had saved their lives. A nice man, really, Mr. Bennet, but he didn't understand these things. He could call the Figurex a living brain all right, as he often did when talking to clients—"I tell you this machine really thinks! I wish some of my staff had its brain capacity, ha, ha.") That was it, though—there was always the "ha, ha." As far as he was concerned, Ernie did not see anything unusual about so marvelous a mechanism thinking. He just wished it wouldn't make those awful mistakes which upset Mr. Bennet so. It didn't have to be one hundred percent accurate; maybe once or twice it could guess low, and then Mr. Bennet would be assured that they were averaging out okay.

Thinking along these lines,

a tremendous idea crackled through Ernie's mind. Maybe, if the official estimates of the forthcoming traffic death toll were placed high, many people would be scared into driving carefully, or even staying at home altogether! That would account for the discrepancy, of course, although it didn't quite answer the question of why the statistics fed into the Figurex didn't allow for this.

He took advantage of the solitude to speak aloud to the glistening machine, a thing he wouldn't ordinarily do.

"You know," he said gently, as he buffed it, "I believe you purposely figure high, just to save as many lives as you can. But I sure wish I knew how you do it!"

A sudden whirring of the gears made him withdraw his hand, and he stared fascinated as the type faces exposed themselves and printed on the roll of clean white paper. At first, Ernie thought he had inadvertently depressed a button, but then he realized he had been working at the side of the machine, away from the controls.

He peered intently at the words which had appeared and he gasped. Staring back

at him in clear black type were the words, "I think."

He dropped the cloth and gave a whoop of joy.

"I knew it, I knew it!" he shouted. "Then you *did* call me back today, didn't you? You sent me a message."

Again the gears hummed, and the Figurex printed the single word, "Yes."

"Wonderful!" Ernie said, delirious with happiness. Then slowly his smile faded and he became serious. "It was very nice of you," he said, "and I want you to know that I feel . . . well, I appreciate it very much." He chuckled as the thought struck him. "You know, the guys here would think I was nuts if they heard me talking to you. But I guess you and I can keep our little secret. There's one thing I'd like to know, if you don't mind: why me? I mean, why'd you pick me to send the message to?"

The wheels spun and the type-faces snapped up and down. Ernie read the message and tears came to his eyes. He stared through the happy mist and the words engraved themselves in his heart.

"I love you," said the Figurex.

THE END



REPORT ON A BACKWARD PLANET

By RUSS WINTERBOTHAM

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

The investigator from outer space was sure of only one thing—reforming the folks on Earth was going to be a lot of fun!

IT IS with extreme misgivings that I must report to your most exalted excellency that a tragic misfortune overtook our expedition on the fourth leg of our voyage of exploration.

The sad incident occurred when we landed on one of the planets, the third, of a fourth

magnitude star called Sun, which is populated by all sorts of weird and unforgettable monsters, the most intelligent of which calls itself *Homo Sapiens*.

In accordance with your command to contact and to exchange information with whatever creatures we found

who were intelligent enough to communicate to us their thoughts, we set out to establish some sort of understanding.

This was extremely difficult because the inhabitants, who possess a certain degree of understanding and intelligence, are, nevertheless, surrounded by a certain mental inertia, due partly to environment, partly to breeding, and partly due to manners and customs, which prevent them from accepting ideas which do not conform with their own peculiar ideas of what things should be. In the words of our young leader Senoj, *Homo Sapiens* would rather die than do anything original.

From the moment we arrived on this planet, which was called the Earth, we were disregarded and ignored. Our subsequent deciphering of communications in regard to our first manifestations to these creatures, disclosed that several of their leaders were taken to task for shooting off "unclean atom bombs," resulting in abnormal "fallout." It was difficult to comprehend the meaning of this jargon until we discovered that these aborigines had achieved the simplest form of atomic fission with its attendant dangers.

The more ignorant of these creatures took refuge in even greater nonsense, contending that we were "spirits" and "ghosts." Some of them contended that we were "hallucinations" and compared us with Flying Saucers. We have since learned what a saucer is, and we cannot understand why we were described as such. We are not disc-shaped, are not used to eat from, and we are not made of anything that a saucer is made of. Possibly no *Homo Sapiens* has ever conceived of self-contained energy globules which can think and reproduce.

However, we were fortunate at first because by condensing our volumes to such a size that we could not be perceived by the clumsy sensory organs of *Homo Sapiens*, we were able to probe many of their works, to observe their culture, and to visit their institutions without incurring the belligerence that we quickly observed was part of their natures.

We discovered to our amazement that *Homo Sapiens* is both social and anti-social. While it pretends to have great concern over the welfare of the individual, it often makes war against its own kind.

At the moment of our arrival, we discovered, for example, that the most advanced of these creatures were in competition with each other. Several groups were attempting to become the first to venture off the planet into space. To make such a big thing of such a small matter seemed to us almost laughable, except that these creatures were utterly serious about it.

A few, less advanced groups, opposed to space travel, were contending that it was the dream of idiots. They refused to see that almost anything could be undertaken and accomplished if the proper approach and preparation were made. This was the first inkling we had of the fundamental inertia of the mind of these creatures. Although the more advanced had struggled past the barrier, they also were harassed by other, less tangible, psychological obstacles.

After we had deciphered the exploding emotions of these creatures and learned the reason for their pitiable plight, Enuj Senoj called us into a sparking session. He pointed out that your most exalted excellency had commanded us not to interfere with the orderly ways of life on any world we visited, but

at the same time you had urged us to aid intelligent beings when it was possible.

Surely, no creature in the universe needs aid more badly than *Homo Sapiens*.

We had already determined that anything outside the experience of these beings was likely to be rejected, and Senoj suggested that we must initiate aid in such a manner that it would appear to come from one of the creatures themselves, rather than from an outsider.

Our leader, Enuj Senoj, proposed that half of our party assume the outward material form of *Homo Sapiens*. Thus the reins of leadership could be grasped and the species could be guided from their misguided ways.

It was no small task, for it meant the construction of millions of complicated cells, largely of carbon compounds, and the distillation of uncounted fluids in order to cover our radiant selves with the type of bodies worn by *Homo Sapiens*.

Enuj Senoj determined that there are two types of these creatures. While all *Homo Sapiens* are fundamentally the same, there are small, but important differences. We saw no utilitarian purposes fulfill-

ed by these differences and decided therefore to model ourselves in conformity with the more esthetic of these types, which is denoted in the language of the race by a prefix, *wo*. One type is called Man, the other Wo-man.

Not only is wo-man more beautiful to look upon, but except in certain frustrated and aberrant types, it has a far more subtle character. The species adorns itself in beautiful raiment, and applies pigments and tinctures to its face and claws.

Needless to say, we left nothing undone to make our models very esthetic and on our trial run we noted rewarding glances from the Man types we encountered.

As we have noted, only half of our number was transformed. The remaining half embedded itself in minds of the aborigines so that thoughts could be transferred quickly and telepathically.

Because *Homo Sapiens* has a primitive mind and its thinking processes are slowed and even thwarted by the inertia we spoke of, some thoughts were difficult to translate.

For example, Enuj Senoj, our leader, was spoken of by *Homo Sapiens* as June Jones,

which is exactly the reverse of his true name.

We assumed, from the works of *Homo Sapiens*, that he was an industrious creature and therefore the leader would be a hard-working person. We sought out the hardest working of all, and found him to be a certain Ekim Bols, or as he called himself, Mike Slob. The following is a transcription by radiant wave tape, of the conversation between Enuj Senoj and Ekim Bols.

Senoj: What do you do for a living, Mr. Bols?

Bols: What do you care, Babe? I just got paid.

Senoj: My dear sir, I possess above all things, discrimination. Before we become friends it is necessary to know what kind of a man you are.

Bols: This is the first time I ever met a tomato like you, honey. But if it means anything, I handle garbage.

Senoj: I understand you are greatly troubled by this race to become first to conquer space?

Bols: If you ask me, everybody's nuts.

Senoj: Am I to understand that you have something better in mind?

Bols: Enough of this talk, Babe. I certainly do have something better in mind.

What Mr. Bols had in mind was different from space travel although lack of time prevented Senoj from undertaking the experiment.

The next aborigine we contacted pretended to work hard with his mind, although he had inferior equipment to work with. He wore clothing described as gray flannel and he hurried and scurried from room to room in a vast structure where everyone was behaving in a frenzied fashion. It was very difficult to understand what he was talking about, and even his thoughts were confused. We preserved a tape of our interview, but the results were almost precisely the same as the interview with Mr. Bols.

We had begun to suspect that perhaps something was wrong with our technique, but Senoj was not the type of radiant that gives up easily. She persuaded your humble servant to accompany her on her next interview.

For this we selected one of the younger individuals, since his mind had not yet had time to be encrusted with psychological inhibitions, or conditioned by frustrations that beset so many of this race. Your humble servant situated himself at the base of the crea-

ture's brain where he could direct the senses without being detected.

I learned at once that the creature was a young Man, and his name was Mot Nollidnav, which he insisted on pronouncing Tom VanDillon. He was just what we had hoped to find, a young engineer developing a vehicle to travel into space.

Senoj suggested that, instead of a vehicle, he rid himself of his cumbersome, outmoded body and go into space joyously and unencumbered as your servants have traveled so often through distant universes.

Mot's eyes grew troubled as he replied, "Indeed, you must be from another world to speak thusly. It is impossible for us to separate our bodies from the life-spark that makes them work. To do so would cause instant death."

As I relayed this information to Senoj, she pondered for a moment. "In that case," she said, "it is no wonder we cannot understand *Homo Sapiens*. We have tried to imitate them biologically, and we find that we are emotionally and structurally in opposition. This must be corrected at once."

You well know, your most exalted excellency, that it is

outside of our natures to say that a thing cannot be done. Nor do we doubt the wisdom of our leaders, but I must confess that from the beginning I was filled with trepidation as I aided Senoj in this step. Nevertheless, I obeyed. I gave Senoj each detail of the biological processes that vitiated each cell and each atom of these aboriginal monsters.

Bit by bit, Senoj transformed herself, tightening connections, creating by chemistry and biological electronics the diverse and complicated structure of a human being. In the end, Senoj was so human that I could discern nothing about her that belonged to our race.

No longer did a halo fluoresce about her head, nor did her visual organs shine with ethereal light. No longer did her thoughts pour forth in uninhibited telepathic screams. No longer did she propound the impossible, the fantastic and the new. She was *Homo Sapiens*, a vile low-down human being.

At the base of Mot's brain, I felt a new coursing of animal emotions. A wild, untranslatable feeling. I thought at first that he would fission, but now I understand that reproduction among *Homo Sapiens* is a vastly different thing.

Before I could disentangle myself, Senoj did a most unusual thing from the depths of her animal prison. She, our brave leader, clasped Mot in her arms and placed her lips against his.

She said, "My dear *Homo Sapiens*, now I understand you. I even understand the man who collected garbage and the being in the gray flannel suit. All, without exception, are driven by this blind urge. It is what makes Man what he is, and Wo-man what she pretends to be."

I shouted telepathic warnings, but she gave no heed.

"Shut up, compatriot," she said, "it is our mission to help these humble creatures."

This, of course, was utter nonsense. Your most exalted excellency must understand that she was not helping, but degrading herself. That one of our kind should do such a thing was utterly beyond comprehension.

Mot held Senoj in his arms and his words grew soft and endearing. She, on the other hand, no longer addressed her remarks to me. She talked directly to him and I had difficulty in knowing what was going on between them.

Desperately, I tried to control Mot's mind, but instead,

she controlled him. "You are losing your perspective!" I shouted.

Her thoughts rolled back: "I'm not losing anything," she said. "I am gaining an entirely new conception of life. Will you get the hell out of Mot's subconscious mind so that things can take a normal course?"

Although she spoke by telepathy, Mot seemed to grasp something of what she said. He asked, "Did you say something, June, my dear?"

"I said nothing," she replied, "but I do wish you'd rid yourself of your nasty inhibitions."

Suddenly I was aware of a turmoil all around me. Racing counter-currents shut off my power to fix myself at the base of Mot's brain. I was urged, squeezed and pushed from the mind of this low creature and cast out into the magnetic flux about me.

As I looked down and saw these lovers embraced, I turned my visual equipment aside and left hurriedly. I could not stand the sight of our brave leader losing her superiority to a lower animal. For, instead of wresting the reins of leadership from *Homo Sapiens*, our kind was being led.

With ultimate speed, I attempted to find others of my

kind. I broadcast myself to the four corners of the earth. Everywhere I found the radiant ones, cast out of human brains like myself, wandering homeless without the leadership of Senoj. Those who had attempted to mimic *Homo Sapiens*, had been lost. For they had intermingled their life energy with the bodies they wore.

We no longer hunt them, for they are gone beyond redemption. The only course left now is for us, in turn, to clothe ourselves in bodies like our brave leaders and become Men and Wo-men. It is a most humiliating position for our kind to be in, to have been overwhelmed by base emotions of a lowly creature, who is so dull-witted as to be unable to understand our kind.

And the more I study these Men and Wo-men, the more difficult it becomes to reason why.

I wonder, sir, if it is possible that everything which possesses life, no matter what kind of life it is, must exist in darkness, unable to understand what is beyond its own limited experience. Can it be that we, too, cannot understand something that has no common ground with us?

If so, I beseech you to grant

(Continued on page 97)

A Lesson For The Teacher

By ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Ruth Bailey wanted to engage in matrimony. But she was faced with two problems—a gorgeous young competitor and a guy who wanted to practice a while before he signed up.

ALL right," said Ruth Bailey. "Let's face it. I'm thirty-seven.

"Thirty-seven," she repeated. "That's the age when even the biggest Hollywood stars have trouble getting another five-year contract from a major studio. The age when a dramatic actress thinks twice before playing a fourteen-year-old Juliet, and then goes ahead and does it anyway, praying that the critics will be kind. At thirty-seven the career woman stops being a private secretary and begins to climb. It's the time when a postitute has to decide whether to become a madame or a scrubwoman; when a society matron sheds her third husband and looks for a fourth, and the housewife starts pestering her husband about mov-

ing out to the suburbs and joining a country club. Why, at thirty-seven some women become grandmothers! Time to sit back and enjoy the menopause that refreshes."

Ruth Bailey shook her head and smiled wryly. "That old saying about life begins at forty may hold true for men, but thirty-seven is the crucial time for most women. And what have I to show for it?"

Nobody answered her question, because Ruth Bailey was talking to herself. She'd found herself getting into the habit lately, and it was beginning to worry her. Lots of things were beginning to worry Ruth recently. Like being lonely at night and nobody giving a damn about her, and overhearing the kids talk about "Old Lady Bailey" at school.

Kids. All those young people.

She sat down on the bed and thought about them for a moment. For fifteen years she'd been a school-teacher, and there'd been nothing in her life but kids. Was it really fifteen years since Nick had been killed in the war? That's right—she'd been just twenty-two then, and ever since that time she'd taught. The way it looked now, she'd go right on teaching until she retired.

For a while Ruth had thought she might be getting somewhere with Harold Ferris, the manual-training instructor. Things had even reached the point where he invited her over to look at his ship-models.

Maybe she shouldn't have turned the invitation down. But at the time, Ruth thought it wise to play coy and kittenish. That was last semester, before Ann Corwin came to join the high school faculty. Ann Corwin, the Home Ec instructor—what on earth would a man like Harold Ferris see in her? Why, she was nothing but a young snip!

Ruth's lips shaped themselves into the wry smile again. That was the answer, of course. Ann Corwin was young. Young, and pretty; just the kind of a girl who

any red-blooded manual-training teacher would invite up to inspect his flotilla. She'd probably seen the whole fleet by now, while as for Ruth—"I guess I just missed the boat," she told herself.

She rose and stood before the mirror. She didn't preen. Thirty-seven is no age for preening, if you're an honest woman. And Ruth was, she insisted, honest. Still, she had to admit what she saw wasn't *too* bad. Her hair was still brown and glossy. Her skin, and the flesh beneath it, remained firm. She had good color and her figure wasn't too bad—maybe she'd been smart never to go in for the uplift bra fad.

"You're no spring chicken," she told herself earnestly, "but I'm damned if you're an old hen, either."

Well, it was nothing to cackle about. She was still thirty-seven, whether she looked her age or not, and today was her birthday. A fine celebration she was having, too. No relatives in the world to remember the occasion with presents, and Harold Ferris hadn't even sent her a card. No cake, no candles. "Just as well," she mused. "The heat from thirty-seven candles would kill me."

Sure, that was the way.



There was enchantment in the music and the soft lights.

Laugh it off. Kid herself about it. Only all at once, standing there in front of the glass, Ruth Bailey didn't feel like kidding herself any longer. She peered at the mirror intently—not at her reflection, but at the shiny surface itself. The mirror had been here in her room ever since she moved in, fifteen years ago. Now it was beginning to speckle, to dull and tarnish in spots. You couldn't really notice it until you looked closely, but the process of decay was going on. And it would continue, slowly but inexorably. Eventually the mirror would crack; then it would be discarded in the junk-heap, with nobody to mourn its former, forgotten brightness—

"Oh, *stop!*" she told herself, turning away. But there was nothing else to look at in the bedroom except the bed. And nothing to do. In spite of all the old jokes, Ruth had never found a man hiding under her bed.

"And what's more, you never will," she said, aloud. "This is the way it's always been, the way it always will be." Her voice broke. "Damn it, why *can't* there be a man under the bed, just once? Even a brush salesman?"

In a moment, she realized angrily, the tears would come.

Because there was no man under her bed, no man in her bed, no man at all.

Her eyes brightened, ready for liquid release, then widened suddenly at the sound of a knock on the door.

Ruth opened it and stared up at her visitor.

He was young, he was dark, but above all, he was tall. He must have been six feet five, at least, and he towered above her in a way no brush salesman would ever do. Brush salesmen are small and neat and cheerful. This man was big, and he wore a rumpled slack-suit and his gray eyes were grave. But he *was* a man.

"Miss Bailey?" His voice was deep, very resonant, and he spoke with just the slightest hesitant trace of an accent. "You *are* Miss Bailey, are you not?"

Ruth nodded, but he didn't seem quite satisfied.

"The Miss Bailey who teaches the Social Science at the upper school?"

"High school," she corrected, congratulating herself that she'd guessed right about the trace of accent. "I teach Social Science, yes."

"Good. I was told I could find you here." He paused. "My name is Clay." He paused.

ed again, as if he expected some reaction from Ruth.

"Pleased to meet you," she said, mechanically. Her next phrase was no better, but she had to say something. "What can I do for you?"

"I would like you to teach me."

Ruth blinked. "But—"

"I know. It is all most unregular. But I made to inquire at the school, for someone who would be a private tutor. And you were suggested. It was said that your evenings were free."

Yes, Ruth told herself, *my evenings are free.*

"Oh, I do not mean that I will not pay," said Clay. He smiled. "My English is not too perfect. That is one of the things I wish you to help me about."

"Then why not take a night-school course in English?" Ruth asked. "There are some very good—"

"Please. I am a stranger, I do not feel yet at ease in a group. Besides, it is not just a matter of language. It is the customs, the folkways, the Social Sciences you instruct, this I wish to learn. I have so little of it where I come from."

"And that is—?" Ruth murmured.

"Martinique," Clay told her. "Fort-de-France."

"The West Indies? How exciting."

Clay shrugged. "Very dull. Very, how you say, provincial. I must learn the whole world. You will help me?" And he smiled again.

The smile decided her. After all, why not? He was a man, a handsome man. And her evenings were free.

"Why not?" Ruth answered. "Shall we say three nights a week? My fee will be five dollars an evening."

"Agreed. Can we start tomorrow night? Here?"

Ruth hesitated, thinking of her landlady. A mean, gossiping old biddy—she was bound to talk. Well, let her talk. It was about time Ruth gave her something to chew on. About time? It was literally now or never.

Ruth returned Clay's smile, with interest. "Tomorrow night," she echoed. "Here."

And so it began.

At first Ruth was uneasy. How could she work out a formal program of instruction for a grown man? She was no Margaret Mead.

But then, Clay was no ordinary student. He much preferred the informal discussion, the question-and-answer approach. He was not just interested in facts and figures; he

did not want mere knowledge, but *understanding*.

So they talked. They talked of cabbages and kings, and it sometimes became a seminar in philosophy rather than a lesson in civics. Ruth was delighted with Clay's perceptive mind, with his incisive questions.

Ruth was delighted with Clay, period.

She admitted as much to herself. He was shy, even to the point of reticence, concerning his own background and achievements—but eager to learn every detail of her own existence, past and present. It was all very flattering. His deference to her opinions, his courtesy, his reliance on her judgment, formed a startling contrast to the attitude of her regular daily pupils.

Her daily pupils. Ruth had always found it difficult to face them. Now it was becoming intolerable. The kids were awful, and getting worse. The change had started way back at the end of the war. That's when the convertibles began to show up in the parking-lot, and the reefers began to turn up in the pockets of the leather jackets. Then came rock-n'-roll and the I'm-Tough cult of Brando and Dean. Respect and responsibility vanished, and with it the wish to learn. Oh,

there were still exceptions, and Ruth didn't make the mistake of damning an entire generation as juvenile delinquents. But sometimes it seems as if the rebel yells of the rebels without a cause drowned out all other sounds, and it was a blessed relief to seek refuge in those nights with Clay. Ruth found herself looking forward to each evening—the three a week she spent teaching, and the two nights when they just went out together.

For that was the most recent development, the going out together. Clay had suggested it.

"Why not?" he argued. "What better way is there for me to learn—how is it said?—the folkways and the culture? To dine, to enjoy the entertainment, it is all a part of Social Sciences."

Ruth didn't resist very strenuously. She knew what was happening to her, of course, but she didn't really care. In fact, she had reached the point where she took an exultant delight in the opportunity to flaunt Clay's company to the world.

After years of dining in shabby tea-rooms at a deuce-table next to the swinging doors of the kitchen it was

pure heaven to walk into a good restaurant on the arm of a handsome man and be wined and dined in style. A childish vanity, childish phrased, but it meant a lot to the woman in Ruth. And Ruth was increasingly conscious of her womanhood. Once she assured herself that Clay seemed to possess ample funds, she had no further scruples about his extra-curricular attentions. She accepted the pleasures, enjoyed them.

And that, of course, was the cause of her downfall.

Came the inevitable night when she and Clay bumped into Harold Ferris and Ann Corwin. The manual-training teacher and his colleague were out on the town. At first Ruth looked upon the meeting as the climax of her personal triumphs. She enjoyed the astonished look on Harold Ferris's face when introduced to Clay, and was just catty enough to relish the poorly-concealed envy of Ann Corwin when she covertly contrasted her aging escort with Ruth's handsome pupil.

But after Harold and Ann joined them at their table and had a few drinks, Ruth began to regret the affair. Particularly when Clay asked the younger woman to dance.

Harold Ferris was asking her questions about Clay, and she answered impatiently, her eyes and mind intent on the couple circling the floor. They moved perfectly together; the tall, youthful man and the tall, youthful blonde. Youthful. That's what they had in common—youth. They were talking and smiling at one another, and all at once Ruth realized the truth. She wondered if Harold Ferris had any inkling of it; that these two belonged together.

Apparently he did not, for he said nothing and exhibited no sign of jealousy. And there was just the bare possibility that there was no reason for being jealous, either, for when Clay and Ann returned to the table they behaved quite decorously.

When Clay escorted Ruth home that evening, it was as if nothing had changed. He never even spoke of the blonde girl. For a moment Ruth was relieved. Maybe she was just imagining things. As usual, under these circumstances, she began the old interior debate again—should she ask him in? For the corny nightcap, the corny clinch? She'd never dared, knowing it was corny; knowing, at the same time, that she wanted just that. Perhaps tonight was the time.

He was standing outside the door now as she fumbled for her key; he was looking down at her and smiling, and his eyes were warm. She had only to look up and say—

But he said it first.

"I shall not be seeing you to-morrow night."

"No lesson?"

He shook his head. "We will resume the night after, yes? It is that I have a former—no, a previous—engagement. Yes, other plans."

"Oh."

"It is with your friend, the Miss Corwin."

"Oh," said Ruth again, and what she wanted to do was cry and curse at the same time, what she wanted to say was, *Damn it, did you have to tell me, don't you even care enough about me to lie about it?*

What kind of a man was Clay anyway, to brush her off, come out with it in cold blood, and still stand there and smile at her? So he was a foreigner, he was from Martinique; weren't Frenchmen supposed to be gallant?

"She is very pretty, Miss Corwin. And I have a feeling I may learn much from her, too. The Social Sciences, you know."

"Yes," said Ruth. "The Social Sciences." She stooped and inserted the key in the

lock. "And now will you please go away? I'm very tired."

"Tired?" A frown creased Clay's forehead. "But I was hoping we might still talk. There is a thought I wished to express, about the—what is the word?—sexual relationships of society."

Ruth wanted to laugh in his face. No, that wasn't true; she wanted to cry in his face. Instead she straightened up and said, very quickly, "Anything you want to learn in that department you can find out from Miss Corwin. She's an exceptionally competent instructor."

Then she walked inside and slammed the door.

The next forty-eight hours were the hardest. It was bad that first night, it was worse the next day, it was almost unbearable the night following, and the succeeding day was utter agony.

But by the time the third evening arrived, Ruth had faced up to everything.

She sat before the mirror after her lonely supper and made her summation. "I should have known nothing would come of it, really. I'm too old for him, for one thing. Besides, I know next to nothing about the man, the whole affair is utterly ridiculous. If

he shows up tonight I'm going to tell him to go to hell. Only—*I love him.*"

She could have skipped the rest. But the rest was true, too, and the rest was important. Any good Social Science teacher could tell you that. But at the moment, Ruth was not a good Social Science teacher. She was a frightened, middle-aged woman in love. No, not even a woman—just an emptiness, an emptiness which waited to be filled, wanted to be filled, *had* to be filled in spite of rhyme or reason. An emptiness sitting on the edge of the bed, gazing into a blank mirror and poised for the sound of footsteps which were going to come this way, *must* come this way.

They came.

And Ruth rose, and went to the door, knowing what she would say to him, knowing what she would do. She'd not ask questions, she'd not demand answers. She'd just hold out her arms and nothing else would matter.

The girl ran into the room.

"Ann! What are you doing here?"

"Where is he? Where is he?"

"I don't know. If it's Clay you mean, he has a room—"

"Yes. I went there first. I

told the police to look for him there."

"Police?"

"Oh, God, I'm so frightened—"

Ruth looked at her. She'd been crying and her face was drawn. Her lips trembled as she spoke.

"He's crazy, that's what's the matter," Ann was murmuring. "Last night we went out, and then afterwards, in his room—but you know, too, don't you? I mean, he must have—" She broke off abruptly, shuddering.

"No," said Ruth, softly. "I don't know. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"It wasn't so much what he did. It was the way he *talked* to me, the way he *looked* at me—and the *questions*. I mean, you don't ask *questions*, not unless you're a maniac. That's when I knew he was crazy. And then I saw the six toes, and he said yes, other things were different, too, and he *showed* me—" She shuddered again, her voice breaking. "He's a maniac, that's what he is, and I went to the police, and I wanted to warn you. If he comes here, you'd better call them right away." She hesitated. "*Is* he coming here?"

It was Ruth's turn to hesitate. "I don't think so," she said, at last.

"All right. They'll catch him anyway, at his room when he goes back. They know there's something wrong. I guess they investigated. Harold told me not to worry. I'm going to see him right now, he's waiting for me. But, Ruth, be careful! Please!"

Ruth nodded.

Long after Ann left she was still nodding, nodding to herself and to her reflection in the mirror.

Then she stopped nodding as *he* came. And she opened the door, and she did not hold out her arms. She just sat there and stared at the floor and said, "The police are looking for you. Ann told them. They know all about you, now."

"All about me?"

"Well, what they don't know, they'll find out. So you might as well tell me, too. Your name isn't Clay, is it? And you're not from Martinique, either. And you have six toes, and—"

"Six toes? Did *she* tell you that?"

"She told me everything." Ruth looked at him for the first time and was surprised to find him blushing. "How could you?" she sighed. "How could you do it? She thought you were crazy, staring at her and

asking her questions. Questions, for heaven's sake! Why on earth—?"

"Because I wanted to learn," he said, softly. "Didn't you say she could teach me? That is why. Because I wanted to learn on earth. Learn everything."

He moved closer and gazed down. "I am not altogether ignorant, you know. I read books first, many books, before I dared make contacts. And I remembered the advice of some of your anthropologists. They say the best way to learn about a different culture is to find a native woman, and discover the customs of the country. That is why I sought Ann."

"Why her, why not me?" Ruth snapped.

"There was a reason."

"I'm too old."

"Old?" The frown appeared on his forehead. Then he smiled and shook his head. "Old? As you reckon time, you are thirty-seven, no?"

"Yes," Ruth admitted.

He took her hand. "That is as I thought. So there is no problem. I, as you reckon time, am four hundred and twelve."

"But—"

"You're not afraid, are you? Because of the age, because of the six toes? Otherwise, basically, we are very much alike. That is why I was sent here,

because we discovered how similar you were to us. I came to learn your ways. No, not with any idea of conquest in mind—merely understanding. There is much that your culture can contribute to ours. I found that out from your teaching. At the outset the thought was that I would learn and return home, to become a teacher to my own world. Now I have another idea. If your police are seeking me, it is best if I leave at once. But there is no need for me to go alone. Will you come with me?"

"As a teacher?"

"Yes. He took her other hand. "And as my—what is the word—wife?"

"That's the word," Ruth said, softly. "And there are other words." She stared at him for a moment.

"I love you," he whispered.

"Then that's settled." Ruth stood up. "How do you leave?

What does one pack for a trip in a flying saucer?"

He chuckled. "No saucer. Just hold my hands. It is a psycho-physical process which we call *czorgy*. Oh, there will be much for *you* to learn now, too."

"I'm sure of it, darling."

Ruth grasped his hands.

"Now?" she asked. . . .

There was quite a scandal over Ruth's disappearance with the handsome foreigner. Both Harold Ferris and Ann Corwin were particularly upset.

Unfortunately for their peace of mind, Ruth never reported her whereabouts. It was quite impossible, due to the limitations of the postal system. And even if she could have managed it, she hesitated to send them a card to say that she and her star pupil were honeymooning on *Iar Arc-turus*.

THE END

REPORT ON A BACKWARD PLANET

(Continued from page 86)

those who remain unpolluted by these creatures of the Earth, permission to stay on here on this planet. Perhaps we can aid the lower forms of life by joining with them. It does not appear to be so bad, even though we must still re-

gard them as inferior to ourselves.

It might, your exalted excellency, even be fun, and if you are not afraid, you might try it yourself . . . as I am about to do.

Off and over. . . .

THE END

VOODOO QUEEN

By BRYCE WALTON

ILLUSTRATOR KEITH

"Just to look at her drove men crazy." That was what they said about an incredible woman of old New Orleans, around whose life was woven such a maze of legend that it is difficult to separate the true from the false. But, beyond all doubt she was one of the most successful practitioners of voodoo who ever lived.

THE grapevine conveyed the Queen's promise from one end of New Orleans' Voodoo underground to the other:

"*She will not let them hang Antoine Cambre. She has fixed him!*"

Antoine Cambre was one cult member whose faith was being considerably strained by circumstances. He had murdered a man in a drunken carouse. He was a member of an old aristocratic Creole family, but even their influence hadn't been able to save him. In a few hours he would be sitting over the gallows hole, a black hood on his head, the twin loops around his



She appeared out

OF NEW ORLEANS



of nowhere—as if by magic.

sensitive neck. The sheriff would raise his hand. The executioner would spring the trap.

What could even the Voodoo Queen do to save him? What kind of a hoodoo *fix* could get him out of this? She wouldn't have made a promise she wouldn't keep. Her reputation was at stake.

Antoine mumbled incantations, made cabalastic gestures. He didn't deny he was *fixed*. He only knew that his sense of mortality insisted on suffering acute anxiety. He prayed for a substantial sign of salvation.

Cloth rustled. Looking up, Antoine was joyfully shocked to see the goddess herself standing just outside the bars of his death cell. He fell babbling to his knees, stretched his hands through the bars to touch her blue skirt. That she was inside Parish Prison was a miracle encouraging not only renewed optimism, but pure conversion. At that moment, Antoine believed everything he had ever heard about Marie Laveau, that she could turn herself into a dog, and that she had been raised with crocodiles.

Marie Laveau was impressive, an image of female power incarnate. Tall, lithe, with

skin the color of finely-cream-ed coffee, black hair, and fierce black eyes. She was pure sensuality in motion, and just to look at her, it was said, drove men crazy.

But Antoine's immediate sensations were of a strictly non-erotic nature and centered wholly in his neck.

"Save me, save me, my Queen," he pleaded.

"You are saved," she said. "My dear, you will never hang."

She wore a kerchief tied with seven knots and the points standing straight up. Large gold hoop earrings and gold bracelets shivered in the pale prison light as she gave Antoine seven candles to burn in his cell, and a *gris-gris* packet, consisting, among other items, of toad's feet, reptile bones, cat hairs and an embalmed scorpion.

She told him to burn the candles while muttering appropriate verbal pleas to *Li Grand Zombi*. "*Eh, Yé Manzelle, Ya, yé, yé li konin tou, gris-gris. Li appé vini, li Grand Zombi, li appé vini, pol fé mourir!*"

Words of power to the believer, and no cultist ever had such a sudden burst of faith as did Antoine Cambre.

For good measure, she gave him a small phial containing a

yellow powder. Antoine was to pour this into his last bowl of gumbo before eating it.

A few hours later, Antoine Cambre was served his last meal which he liberally sprinkled with Marie Laveau's magic powder. When the prison officials returned to walk him to the gallows, the condemned man lay writhing on the floor, screaming.

A few minutes later he was dead.

It was another distinct political *coup* for Marie Laveau. Her already considerable power increased. The fanatical faith of her cult soared higher than ever. The bloated ranks of her disciples fattened.

She had been responsible for the election of a prominent political figure in New Orleans, and his influence had gotten her into Parish Prison. No post mortem search for poison in Antoine Cambre's remains was made, and to have found that he had been poisoned would have been a disgrace to the prison. It was easier to pass it off as a voodoo *fix*.

Marie received a handsome stipend from the Cambres for making sure that Antoine didn't further disgrace their ancestral dignity with a public execution. Later, they even insisted that his crime had

been the result of a *hex* put on him.

Not only that, but several high-born members of the Cambre family, believing that maybe Marie Laveau really had something there, became converts to the Queen's pagan cult, thereby furnishing material for Marie's lucrative blackmail ring.

All in all, it was a very big fix indeed for Marie Laveau. Another of many such ingenious plots whereby she became the most feared and powerful figure in New Orleans, and probably the most notorious and influential female the United States has ever known.

To demonstrate her *power*, and to further exploit Antoine Cambre's timely sacrifice to her career, Marie Laveau called a ceremonial meeting in his honor. It occurred at their favorite conclave site on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain near Bayou St. John.

The time was 1850. The place was the United States of America.

But Marie Laveau's lake soiree was a direct steal from wild Dionysian rituals and the pagan fertility rites of Africa two thousand years ago.

Tapers flared around an eight-foot-long wooden altar

supporting two stuffed cats, and several large live snakes. In the center of the table was a four-foot cypress sapling planted in a keg. Above this was a huge black doll, its dress embellished with cabalistic signs, emblems, and a necklace made of snake vertebra from which dangled a silver-encased alligator's fang.

Dancers and initiates whirled around a bubbling cauldron of frogs, serpents and owl's heads. Negros, Creoles, Mulattos, Indians, Whites, all mingled in a mutual admiration for paganism. Satanic discords on cylinders made of thin cypress staves hooped with brass and headed with sheepskin boomed in the darkness, banged with sheep shank bones and the leg bones of buzzards. Gourds a foot and a half long, filled with pebbles, were vigorously shaken and twirled.

Marie Laveau rose from her throne, chanted in Gumbo French, and sang, "*Saiya ma coupê ça.*" All hands joined in the chorus of "*Mamzelle Marie chauffez ça.*"

A cat was brought and the Queen cut its throat and put it in a kettle. Another chorus. Then a black rooster was brought, and the Queen tied its feet and head together and

put it alive into the pot. Then the Queen ordered everybody to undress as she let the red handkerchief fall from her hips. She spewed shot bags full of colored powders into the firelight as the chorus chanted, "*C'est l'amour, oui Maman c'est l'amour.*"

The Queen's current lover and high priest, the King of the Year, seized her and they began a writhing dance while screaming invocations, curses and sacred words. The celebrants were, by this time, thoroughly possessed by the power. The chant rose to the hypnotic monody of huge bones on skin-covered casks.

At this point, Marie Laveau was pleased to see some of the town's finest ladies, heavily veiled, arrive, send their carriages away, take off their shoes and stockings, then their clothes except chemises. They put lighted candles on their heads and leaped into the frenzied bacchanal.

The subsequent orgies are better imagined by non-participants than described. However, a sensitive Christian soul, J. W. Buel, who peeked at this ritual one night and later on wrote about it in a book called *Metropolitan Life Unveiled, or the Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities*, tried to describe

it. He couldn't even stay for the finale.

Said Mr. Buel, "Suddenly the fires flared up and went out, leaving nothing but a faint glow from the dying pyres. I had grown sick from heat, from an indescribable horror that took possession of me. With one bound I was out of the glade . . . if ever I have realized a sense of the real visible presence of his majesty, the devil, it was that night among his Voodoo worshippers."

But it wasn't devil worship Mr. Buel ran from. It was the remains of an ancient pagan fertility rite, embellished with varied religious symbols, and hyped up by Marie Laveau who was an excellent show-woman.

The events that hounded Mr. Buel back to civilization from which many lovely "high born" ladies were sneaking away, involved the blood sacrifice of animals, blood-drinking, participants hissing and crawling on the ground like snakes, shaking like alligators, and screeching like hoot owls. It also included a great feast of grapes, oranges, pineapples, elderberry wine, watermelons, gumbo and jambalaya, and climaxed with promiscuous cavortings in the surrounding woods.

Marie Laveau saw to it that everyone, including the likes of Mr. Buel, lost their heads at these ceremonies. Everyone, that is, but herself. She was far too successful a business woman to have been guilty of swallowing her own *gris-gris*. She knew exactly what she was doing. Her shrewd fierce eyes were always on the box-office till.

To understand the tremendous power Marie Laveau held over a great city and much of the surrounding state, a fresh and realistic reappraisal should be made of the subject of Voodoo. For Marie Laveau merely stepped in and exploited an ancient tradition. She did, so to speak, put Voodoo on a paying basis.

Voodoo came to America over 200 years ago, after African Slave Coast raids brought thousands of pagans to the West Indies. The word is said to have derived from the African snake-god, *Vodu*, worshipped by natives. Later it was supposed to have been corrupted to Voodoo, Voudou, and Voudoux.

It is true that the African Negro respected a number of animal totems, and that one of their many religious fetishes was a snake. This was true of all primitive peoples includ-

ing those of Babylonia, Greece, the American Indian and all stone-age cultures intimately associated with the forces of nature. The fact is, however, that there never was any such African name for a snake as *Vodu*.

Ironically, Voudou was not originally African at all, but was a direct derivation of its founder, Peter Valdo. He was not an African, but a Frenchman. His followers were known in France as Waldenses or Vaudois. They were supposed to have practiced witchcraft and human sacrifice, and the cult was carried to the French West Indies by early migration, adapted by the Negroes and grafted on to ancient fertility rituals.

What the French had helped create, the Spanish and French in the New World soon learned to live in terror of. The sect spread.

In 1782, the Governor of Louisiana stopped the importing of slaves from Martinique. Later, those from Santo Domingo were also forbidden the privilege of Louisiana slavery.

Voudou had become a terrible threat to the slave-owners. It seems that such rituals tended to stir up rebellions and bloody retaliations. The incredible cruelty of the French and Spanish slave-owners is

historical and terror churned it to hysteria.

In addition to brutality, they were guilty of incredible stupidity. Denying that the Negro was human, they also denied him religion on the assumption that he had no soul. In trying to suppress Voudou, they created something infinitely worse. Voudou became more than a religion. It grew as an expression of pent-up hatred, a secret voice of unity, of helplessness, of a longing for revenge, and of a wish for the kind of omnipotent *power* that would enable them to strike back.

The Spanish and French worked their slaves in chains, kept them in animal pens, whipped them to death. Economy was ignored. Horses were curried, but human slaves were expendable.

The slaves were also "broken." They were worked and beaten in special swamp horror-camps, until those who survived were thought to be docile enough not to rebel. But Voudou stirred the most docile to rebellion. Negroes caught assembling for any reason whatsoever were given the *fleur-de-lis* brand, whipped, more often put to death by torture.

A sort of pride can be tak-

en in the fact that these cruelties and restrictions were lifted by American officials following the Purchase of 1803. Voodoo had never been eradicated. It became less dangerous with freedom.

Its ceremonials occurred regularly on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. The cult was always a matriarchy. Women made up over eighty percent of its membership. White people joined the cult from its inception in New Orleans. But they were always women who did so.

A Voodoo Queen always reigned for as long as she could maintain *power* over her disciples. A Voodoo King, the Queen's current lover, and high priest, was replaced each year. The cults' chants, barbaric and exotic and containing the rudiments of jazz were always about the Voodoo Queen.

You can still hear songs in New Orleans about the powerful Queens who ruled. Hoodoo Mag, or Betsy Toledano, Grandma Beavois, Sanité Dédé, and Marie Saloppé.

The greatest of those was Marie Saloppé, and she was easily put out of business by Marie Laveau. Marie Laveau was a controversial figure, but all agreed she was the most *powerful* of them all. She took

over complete control of all Voodoo. She established a dynasty, became an immortal legend, amassed a fortune by unprincipled ingenuity spurred by a driving ambition. She controlled the political machine, and held the ruling aristocracy in the tight bonds of superstition and an intricate system of blackmail.

She became the absolute ruler of New Orleans.

She first appeared on the Voodoo stage August 4, 1819 when she needed a stake to get started and married a native of Jeremias, St. Domingo, named Jacques Paris. Soon as they were married, Jacques vanished mysteriously, conveniently, and permanently.

Then Marie appeared in most of the homes of aristocratic New Orleans families as a hairdresser. Adept as she was at arranging the coiffures of society ladies, her purpose was the accumulating of family secrets. She filled her notebook with the names, dates and dalliances of numerous family skeletons. Soon she knew what Creole gentleman was keeping what quadroon mistress in a certain cottage near Congo Square. She knew what high-born lady was keeping erotic rendezvous with whom and where. She

learned of certain insane aunts, uncles, cousins kept upstairs in the locked rooms of plantation mansions. She found out what public official slept with whom, and those who were stealing from public funds. She was thoroughly familiar with dishonest politicians and police officials and who had corrupted them, and for what.

Meanwhile she had been busily accumulating voodoo lovers, and the most complete store of Voodoo information and practices since the special practitioners of the Middle Ages.

The next step was the elimination of the then ruling Queen, Marie Saloppé. This was easy. Marie Saloppé was, unfortunately, both sincere in her hoodoo beliefs and vulnerable to *hexes*. She believed in Marie Laveau's *fix* so thoroughly that a few days later she was babbling and insane near Congo Square. When Marie Laveau let it be known who had been responsible for Saloppé's *fix*, Marie Saloppé promptly vanished and Laveau gained her following.

Being the indisputed Queen now, Marie Laveau carefully plotted to remain so. Anyone seeking to usurp her throne was promptly *hexed*, murder-

ed, or frightened literally out of their wits.

She quickly built up a vast and lucrative Voodoo business monopoly. Rivals and potential rivals were frozen out. Small voodoo business folded overnight. The whole thing was put on a paying basis, and profits were the important considerations. Modern methods of advertising, showmanship, psychology and promotion went into full-scale operation. She invited the press, the police, thrill-seekers and erotica fans to the formerly ordinary and secret Voodoo rites which she turned into orgiastic public circuses.

Everyone, of course, paid a big admission fee.

Every servant and slave working in or about the houses of ruling aristocracy also worked for Marie. Marie spent nights putting small hoodoo packets, *gris-gris*, dolls stuck with pins, in the yards and stoops of slaves and servants. When they came trembling with fear to her to be "uncrossed" Marie obliged them—but only on condition that they report to her regularly in the capacity of spies.

Soon she controlled city political officials, prominent business men and cops. Her reputation as a prophetess, woman of wisdom, black seer-

ess and powerful *fixer*, rose to such impressive heights that her apartment, according to H. C. Castellanos, ". . . was often thronged with visitors from every class and section, in search of aid from her supposed supernatural powers. Ladies of high social position would frequently pay her high prices for amulets supposed to bring good luck, pregnancy or love. Politicians and candidates for office were known to purchase what we would today call mascots at her shop of Fortune. And gentlemen sports would wear, attached to their watch chains, pieces of bone or wood dug from graveyards. Money poured into her purse."

Marie was always attended these days by beautiful priestesses ready and willing to give their all for the sacred rites. Her house on St. Ann Street became the fanciest bordello in the country where so-called Voodoo rites always ended in sensual free - for - alls that would have turned banal the wildest dreams of Petronius Arbiter. There were ample supplies of food, champagne and wines. The girls danced enticingly naked among the usual props of candles, skeletons, devil dolls and voodoo chants, while drums throbbed, and the curtain came down on

a last act that would have made aging Nero applaud.

High-born ladies paid Marie fortunes for the privilege of participating in her *Fe Chauffe* dances that occurred wildly in Marie's back yard on appropriate nights, where they abandoned themselves to the most savage lusts.

If you wanted to scare children into obedience, you threatened to give them to Marie Laveau. Little girls were never allowed to walk past Marie Laveau's St. Ann Street house. "That woman kept snakes and black cats, spiders and trained roosters and all sorts of other awful living things in that house. She did horrible things. She used to charm people and make them die. She had a snake called 'Zombi' and it was her god."

Mrs. O'Hara who lived on the lake said, "Men followed Marie Laveau around like dogs. They was hoodooed. She could make any man leave his woman. She put a spell on them. She was a wicked evil woman and she talked to the devil."

But many dark rumors about her were never proven. Such as the claim that she killed babies unwanted by their mothers, and that she

used to hang their bodies up in her chimney like hams and smoke them. Or that she was supposed to have killed many children and that her armoire was said to have been filled with skeletons. She never discouraged such rumors. They were good for business.

But the recorded facts are more delightful than suspected fictions.

There was the Cambre affair already mentioned. The point was that Marie always worked both sides of the Hoodoo fence, and sometimes more than two sides, at the same time. She would get a fancy sum to *hex* someone's enemy. She would be paid another fancy sum to get the enemy *un-hexed*.

Once a rich family requested that Marie *fix* their daughter so she would break off an affair with a Creole gentleman of whom they strongly disapproved. Marie got four pigeons drunk on brandy, wrote four letters, put a letter into the craw of each pigeon, and they flew away. The daughter didn't marry the undesirable suitor. For years, she refused even to look at a man of any type. Later, the rich family returned, paid Marie another fortune for love potions to encourage their daughter to marry anybody.

All servants and slaves in New Orleans were members of Marie's cult, all spies, all firm believers. Many of their masters became believers also.

Prominent society figures asked Marie's advice, came away with expensive *gris-gris*, small bags to bring protection and fortune. These packets consisted of cloth enclosing graveyard dirt, salt, red pepper, colored pebbles, human bone, cat hair and crossed roots. Far more elaborate and expensive *gris-gris*, considered the ultimate in powerful *wanga*, usually for the purpose of bringing instant death, were made from the shroud of a person buried nine days and containing a dried, one-eyed toad, the finger of a man who had committed suicide, a bat's wing, a cat's eye, a dried lizard, an owl's liver, and a rooster's heart.

White masters, unpopular with slaves, would find evil *gris-gris* under their pillows, such as a bunch of feathers shaped like a rooster. Marie usually had the *hex* put there herself in order to sell expensive "uncrossing" charms to the hoodooed.

She sold conjure-balls, made of black wax and said to have been composed mainly of

human flesh, stuck with pins. The buyer would be instructed to place a conjure-ball on the property of his enemy during the night. Death or dire misfortune was sure to follow.

Marie's powerful extra-legal talents put professional lawyers out of business. She knew all the dark secrets of the private lives of juries, judges and prosecutors. She knew of sensitive areas that would respond favorably to slight bribing pressure. For the benefit of her followers, Marie would put the names of judge, jury and prosecuting attorney on a piece of paper and embed it in a lump of ice. Then, in the presence of credulous witnesses, she would lie on the floor rapping on the ice and mumbling incantations. The prisoner would always be free, or dead sometimes, when the ice melted. Always, of course, as a result of Voodoo.

She sold *gris-gris* to servants and slaves to avenge wrong done them by owners and masters. This was usually made of pulverized manure and saffron. Sometimes it was a small wax doll stuck with pins.

Marie was, in addition to her other activities, a devoted wife and mother. She married a man named Glapion, and

bore him fifteen children while building up a great business monopoly. She was truly an efficient career woman. She even distributed business cards containing her name and address and describing her *power*. She received up to \$100 for business calls, everyday *hexes*, charms, potions and the like. One politician paid her \$2000 to be elected judge. Winning love, destroying marriages, bringing ruin to a rival, brought up to \$1000. Causing an enemy simply to die or disappear commanded thousands.

A mere \$10 was needed to buy powder to drop on someone's porch. She charged \$10 more to the victim for *un-hex-ing* powder.

Many of her tricks were works of genius. There was the time when poor old Monsieur S., a rich doddering bachelor, was stricken by the young virginal charms of the daughter of a Creole aristocrat. The girl thought Monsieur S. to be a gruesome goat, but her father desired the match for financial reasons. The girl insisted that death was preferable to Monsieur S. So the girl's father and Monsieur S. sought out the services of Marie Laveau.

She assured them, after

suitable rituals, that the marriage would occur. Powerful *gris-gris* was sold to the girl's father, something to sprinkle in her food. Monsieur S. was also sold powerful *gris-gris* to assure his potency.

A day later, pale and trembling, the girl agreed to marry Monsieur S. Marie Laveau received a bonus. During the celebration following the wedding, Monsieur S. took a sip of champagne, and then, in the middle of a waltz, turned purple and dropped dead.

Marie Laveau had promised that the girl would marry Monsieur S., and she did. The widowed girl inherited Monsieur S's. considerable fortune of which, be assured, Marie Laveau received a fair slice. Unknown to either Monsieur S. or the girl's father, the girl had also paid a visit to Marie Laveau. She had also been sold powerful *gris-gris* powder to sprinkle in the champagne of Monsier S. It worked. All the *gris-gris* worked, and everybody was happy.

Marie's voodoo kit was full of such tricks. She would arrange a liaison between a husband and one of her girls. She would then see to it that the man's wife found out about the affair. The wife would come to Marie for *gris-*

gris to bring her husband back. Then Marie would tell the husband his wife was *hexing* him, and the husband would pay Marie for getting *unhexed*, and so forth.

She sold Follow-Me-Water to ladies. She sold Go-Away Powder to men. Her vast fortune and power increased. But her wealth vanished with her death and was never found. Much controversy persists as to where, how, and when she died. Having earned a niche among mythical and legendary figures, she was said by some to have been carried out into the lake during a great storm and returned to the crocodiles.

However, on a tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 is the inscription which begins:

"Famille Vve Paris née Laveau Ci—Git Marie Glapion, décédée le 11 Juin 1897..."

Go there almost any night now and someone will be knocking three times on the tomb slab and begging for a favor. The green flower-holders attached to the sides of the tomb are filled with pennies and nickels. Fresh flowers appear there often. And sometimes in the darkness you can see candles burning.

There are many who still seek the *power*.

THE END

FANTASTIC

Hello, Young Lover

By LAWRENCE CHANDLER

In the patterned world of the future, amazing things will be possible. You may even be able to go back and recapture that romance you missed—the love you almost had.

THE tense briskness of early morning office air cleared away George's hang-over at once, reminding him of what he had been taught in the company school—that tension used creatively is a thing of healthy growth necessary for executive success. He took the paper from his brief case, the one that would up his pyramidal position at Thorsten Plastics to the top. At this point, the intercom box made the metallic suggestion that he report upstairs immediately to the company's *Personnel Consultant and Counseling Clinic*. The healthily tightening tension turned to something rancid in his viscera.

You went up to PCCC for periodic checks on personal, social, and business adjust-

ment problems, voluntarily of course. But to be summoned early on a critical executive conference morning was disturbing.

As he started out of his glass cage, his presence before the office door activated electronic words bubbling in tubed spirals of plastic: What's Good for the Company is Good for You.

"Hope this won't take long," George said. He returned Dr. Fournier's smile and sat in the posture chair indicated by the young crew-cut clinician. Dr. Fournier referred to the fat personal history folder labeled George Fredricks on his desk.

"It seems you'll be here most of the day, George."

George thought of his prepared paper, pointing out

several dozen loopholes in Barrett's new campaign plan together with ingenious plugs for same. As a result of that paper being read before today's strategy conference, George was sure to be considered for Barrett's 50,000-dollar-a-year post, higher than which you did not go at Thorsten Plastics. A turnover was near in the exec department. The time was now.

"Couldn't it keep until tomorrow?" George asked, carefully.

"This will require a battery of tests," Fournier said. "If we thought it could wait we wouldn't have called you in this morning."

"Of course," George said quickly, and became a politely smiling clam. That file folder on him contained everything that could possibly be known about him, and much he himself could not know. Psychological specialists tapped the unconscious and drew esoteric conclusions. A person forgot, overlooked much of his past. The Company Personnel Engineers did not. Here, in contrast to his usual dominance, George was docile. A man was evaluated by his file. A company clinic boy like Fournier had you by the oysters, could drop you down by juggling a percentile scale,

or revising a personality test. Who could question Fournier's interpretation of ink blots?

"That last night's hassel with your wife was interesting, George. Very interesting indeed."

"Hassel?" George said. The hangover returned.

"What would you call it, George?"

"I came in juggled from wining and dining company clients. We had a few little words. I don't remember much."

"Was it too emotionally loaded to remember much, George?"

George smiled more easily. "I have the utmost faith in my marriage relationship. Your staff okayed it and that's enough for me."

"Changes occur, George. Readjustments are sometimes necessary. Your marriage needs a little tune-up. Your wife's been coming in to see us for some time."

"Really?" George's throat constricted. "I didn't know that."

"We thought it best that you didn't. Now before we run you through a complete re-check, George, a few questions are in order."

George managed a little

laugh. "I've got nothing to hide."

"We all do. Now—when did Laura start being cold? I refer naturally to her being sexually unresponsive."

"When?" George controlled himself. "Why she never—"

"Significant perception cut-off," Fournier said. "Why do you think we recommended that she have a *Lovenest*?"

"I thought she just needed more entertainment. I'm at the office or in the field sometimes eighty hours a week. Laura's a real business widow, but she's never complained. I figured—"

"It started with Laura some time before she got her *Lovenest*," Fournier said. "She's a good wife. She's known the importance of your getting sexual satisfaction. She's pretended a responsiveness she didn't feel. We recognize this worthy duplicity. It helps a man sustain masculine feelings, up to a point. After a while a man normally suspects, whether he admits it readily or no, when his wife isn't responding with genuine passion. How's your pattern holding up, George?"

"Pattern?"

"Sexual pattern. The rise and ebb of desire and capacity."

"Oh — oh, yes. Well — it seems to be going right along."

"It hasn't," Fournier said gently, "and you know it hasn't, George." He tapped the folder. "According to our home-monitor, your pattern has been getting steadily more erratic."

Fournier flipped through the personal history file. "It's all here, George. It's significant that you deny it, not deliberately I know, but because of suppression. Male pride. But here are facts. Desire and aggressiveness down five point three. Frequency of intercourse down ten. Sustained effort during intercourse down three point seven. And so on. Steady decline. Signifies a deeper conflict and we intend to find what that hidden conflict is. Something simple I'm sure. Your chart indicates a basically healthy foundation. But we get at the germ early before it causes serious damage. Nothing affects a man's efficiency on the job so much as his family situation."

"I know that," George said. "I just didn't think that—"

"Now, George, about the significant altercation with Laura last night. Open up, let's have your real feelings about that."

"Altercation?" George said. "I don't recall there was anything heated about it. I came in rather late, called out several times for Laura and—it's a big house for just us two sometimes—and I was woozy and—scared for some reason, a little maybe. Don't know why—had a most satisfactory evening with the clients, specially that one from Ohio—Mosby I believe — and —" George moved one hand vaguely in the air. "I wanted to be with Laura, talk a little —hadn't seen her much and—I found her in the *Lovenest*. She didn't come out and I guess I raised my voice a bit. Then went to bed. That's about all I remember that—"

"You don't remember what you did when Laura didn't come out?"

"I knocked, and then—"

"That's a pretty euphemistic term for your treatment of that door, George. Suppose we refreshen your memory."

Fournier shut the door of the small room with contour chairs facing a wall that was blank but for a tevee screen. They sat down. The light went out.

George watched himself on the screen, a stranger at first, coming into the house last night. He was stiffly con-

trolled, his carefully chosen good-time formal attire of Adriatic blue with Valencia vintage cummerbund unruffled, but his face having a strained tension that was alien.

Then Fournier and the screen and room were gone. It was as if in a dream George had reached across an interval of space-time to take himself warmly and urgently by the hand.

He turned on all the lights in the big house and yelled for Laura. He walked faster, more determinedly from room to room, once running into a glass wall he neglected to slide open. This aggravated his temper. Why the temper? And why the bumbling search? He knew she was in the *Lovenest* with whoever the hell it was. She was in there almost all the damned time lately. He ripped off his tie, and stomped down the hall past his wife's bedroom and stopped outside the door of Laura's *Lovenest*.

He felt a trembling excitement mixed up with cruddy embarrassment. He tried to move on down the hall but instead put his ear to the panel. A warm glow throbbed under the door and the scent of exciting perfume was suddenly unbearably suggestive. He

was on one knee, and pressing his face to the door. His breath came fast and heavy. He strained to hear evidence of what he had abruptly, and ridiculously, started to hate. He held his breath then and pressed damp hands against the door as if trying to feel out subtle passionate undertones. No words, but sighs, little gasps of ecstasy, the rustling, damp sliding of warm flesh yielding to exertions, motions obediently following motions. Then what seemed an interminable silence—the stillness of blissful relaxing.

He knocked on the door. When there was no response he knocked more loudly. Then he began pounding on the door. Then, incredibly, he began kicking it. He was yelling and kicking.

Good God, is that me? Is that me yelling and kicking, throwing a fit? Is that George Fredricks, account executive, having a kid's temper tantrum? How easy to forget that houses selected and financed by the company were bugged, miked and equipped with tevee eyes. No, it was not easy to forget at all. Only a damned fool would let himself perform this way for the Clinic's eyes and ears. The end

was not yet. "Laura," he yelled several times.

"Go way please." Laura sounded like a child waking, mildly irritated, from a deep sleep.

"I want to talk to you, Laura. Open the door."

"You know you're not supposed to come in here," Laura said.

"Dammit, I want in there. Let me in!"

Her words were moist and muffled by familiar pressure, and he could hear the low insistent crooning of the man's hungry voice.

He heard Laura's tremulous whisper. "Hurry—my darling—"

George remembered then that he had only to press a button to open the door, that it had no lock. *Lovenests* were sanctuaries. He stumbled in. It was a fraction of a minute before his entering automatically switched off the power activating the four walls, floor, and ceiling which were three-dimensional projection screens. The power from various organic props about the room, including the radiant bed, faded to a dull glow, then went out. A startlingly real naked figure of lover-boy, real even to the sweating muscles, leaped up from the bed, then did a fast

electronic fade into thin air.

"Laura." George started toward the bed. He scented the burning passion diffusing the air, and dilated his nostrils. Then he stopped walking and looked about at nothing he could name, then looked back at Laura's lubricated nude loveliness sprawled out rigid and pale on the Hollywood bed. Her eyes were fixed and wide on the spot where her lover had just been switched out. Her keyed-up nerves twitched with unrelieved tautness. She began to sob with a low muted hysterical cry for release.

George backed toward the door suddenly feeling like a stoop . . .

Fournier switched on the lights in the booth. George slouched and stared at the dead screen. He did not look up as Fournier smiled and squeezed his sagging shoulder.

"See what we mean?" Fournier said. "Such over-reaction."

"Yes," George said dully.

"All that furor, all for nothing, George. A tevee actor."

"Yeah—" George muttered. "Just a damned ghost."

"Now for the tests," Fournier said. "We want to check

specifically for jealousy syndroms we might have overlooked during previous screenings, and for past sexual obsessions." Fournier's arm was over George's shoulder as they walked down the hall past numbered rooms. "Jealousy being a symptom as I'm sure you know, theoretically at least, of deepseated feelings of inadequacies, and unworthiness."

"Yes, I know," George said as they entered a room neatly designed with testing equipment, and a smiling nurse in crackling nylon.

"You are aggressive enough," Fournier was saying as he tuned up a machine. "But it could be over-compensation. We prefer aggressive, tough, fighting executives here at Thorsten. But not for the wrong reasons. Sit down, George."

He was tested for over eight hours. All the regular personality, psychological millings designed to isolate, filter illusive neurotic germs. Later George was given an injection of truth serum and asked many questions which were properly evaluated by an IBM machine, and a staff.

There was a vague something that seemed to George like a dream, or perhaps a

nice memory out of the past. High school. He was parked up by the observatory at night making-out with his favorite girl friend. Her name was Ruth. The radio was whispering a song about soap.

He had known her a long time. There was something so natural and easy about the way they moved together, the way their mouths touched, played, delightfully prolonging what had always been right from the very first time after that swimming party at Laramer Beach. They moved themselves around in the car seat. The locale was never an inconvenience for them. They were letting themselves be themselves.

He said, "We're going to get married."

"Why sure, honey," Ruth said. She pulled his face down to her breasts. "Anytime you say, honey."

"I'm going to be a trainee with a big outfit," he said. "I don't know yet which one. They all have generous salary policies though. I'll get a periodic wage increase while learning and go right into an executive junior spot with the company. In a year at the school I ought to be making at least 6,000 dollars and we can get married then."

"Anytime you say, honey."

After the tests when they were back in Fournier's front office, the clinician had all the evaluations laid out. Fournier brought back the entire business about Ruth.

"Oh yes," George said. "Ruth. That was such a long time ago wasn't it?" He felt tired and rather old. "I'd forgotten all about Ruth."

"No you hadn't, George. Not at all."

George was looking at something somewhere. He said softly, "I reminded her once that her name really meant pity, maybe compassion. As opposed to ruthless. She didn't know that."

But we didn't get married after all, George thought oddly. Right after that he had been vocationally counseled by a representative of the *Unified Personnel and Guidance Association* who had shunted him into Thorsten Plastics which had underwritten his higher education. It had been necessary to get approval from the company counselors on marital compatibility. Ruth hadn't passed . . .

"There was sexual sympatico with Ruth," Fournier was saying, studying his charts. "One of those special sorts of physical attractions."

They're intangible, not exactly open to analysis. They're powerful though. And they can stay with a man sometimes all his life."

"Yes," George murmured. "We got along."

"Physically," Fournier said, "Your relations with her were more satisfying than they've ever been or ever will be with Laura."

"Is that so? I thought the compatibility tests showed that—"

"Our tests determine a more rounded, wholesome, long-lasting compatibility, George. The kind basic to a man's success. Companies have different standards, different ways of evaluating those things. Ruth would never have helped you, I'm afraid, in being a successful exec at Thorsten. You know we never hire a man alone—we hire his wife as well. His success is invariably tied up with his wife's attitude. In a small community where college-bred girls are less acceptable than those of meagre education, perhaps Ruth would have been acceptable also, but it's doubtful."

"I wish you hadn't brought that memory up," George said.

"It's been there, like a cancer," Fournier said. "It's the basis of your emotional difficulties. And if we hadn't dug

it out it would certainly have caused serious damage and a sure degeneration."

Fournier stood up. His face beamed with professional pride. "So there you have it, George. If you had never enjoyed such deeply satisfying sexual experiences with your little high school amour, then Laura would be physically gratifying as well as being almost the ideal executive's wife in every other way. As it is, Laura will simply never qualify in that compartment. She, however, remains indispensable in every other."

Fournier stuck out his hand. George gripped it.

"So now you'll have a *Love-nest*, George."

George felt too weary to be more than mildly stunned. "But I can't afford two *Love-nests*. I went in the red for Laura's."

"Over the long haul you can't afford not to. Cut down on entertainment, and get rid of the second car. Skimp on a few luxuries. You'll soon be out of the red."

He was walking George to the door.

"Well, thanks for everything," George said.

"What's good for you is good for the company," Fournier said. "They're installing

your *Lovenest* now. It should be ready for you by late tonight. The sooner the better."

"That's very thoughtful of you," George said, "thanks again."

"We've gathered enough psychic info on Ruth and your mutual feelings to make it a sure fire hit, George. We've briefed one of the finest actresses thoroughly, and the best writers in the company have already knocked out scripts. You'll feel a lot different about things in the morning. You're valuable to us, George. And we're valuable to you."

Fournier opened the door. "Goodbye, George," he said.

He lay down on the bed in his new *Lovenest* and turned on the switch. The soft light spread through the waiting darkness like dye, like new blood spreading out through fine tired dry networks of veins and capillaries.

She opened the door and came in. She had the same careless, joyful smile, the same reckless wild leggy walk. She smiled down at him, open and eager.

"It's been several long years, honey," she whispered.

For only a moment he was conscious of her being a projection, a ghost, a resurrec-

tion, of what had or might have been. But old unquenchable desires quickly clothed all illusion with warm and willing flesh. He reached up.

"Ruth," he said thickly. "Sit here—sit here, Ruth—dear old gone Ruthie—"

"Same old George," she said softly.

She unzipped her dress and stepped out of it. He pulled her down beside him. He was unashamed of the hunger sobbing out of him.

"You'll be here all the time now, Ruthie?"

"Anytime you say, honey. You think I'd ever forget how it was with us?"

"No. You don't forget, Ruthie, you never do . . ."

It was the same . . . just the same as it had been . . . when . . . yesterday . . . the day before . . . just the same wonderful sameness after all . . . just the same lovely free everything sameness . . .

He smiled in the warm moist darkness. Even the song . . . that nostalgic old song whispering of soap . . .

And he wondered who Laura's boy was, the one she had loved once in a way she could never love him. But that was one thing at least that would always be a secret, a thing you could never explain to anyone.

THE END



Shadows Over The White House

By VINCENT GADDIS

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Were the strange shadows
some form of mass hypnosis,
or actual omens of evil? And
if this last is true, will they
ever appear again?

THE mysterious black silhouettes on the white pillars of the executive mansion made their first appearance at the start of the present century, apparently foretelling the deaths of four prominent persons and the assassination of President William McKinley. Then they

vanished, leaving behind a puzzle that has almost been forgotten.

It was not the first time that the White House had been the scene of strange tales. President Lincoln had experienced several prophetic dreams, notably one forecasting his own death. Later

there were stories that his shade had been observed on the double flight of stairs that formerly led to the executive business offices. Witnesses had said it was impossible to mistake his tall, bent figure and shambling gait.

In earlier years there were legends that President William Henry Harrison, who died in the White House, had returned to the attic of the mansion, once used for purposes of storage. And it was said that Abigail Adams, the first mistress of the historic dwelling who hung her clothes to dry in the East Room, was occasionally observed passing across the central hallway.

But the so-called "shadow-graphs" were unique in the realm of the strange. Hundreds of spectators watched them over a period of almost two years. There was widespread astonishment and speculation and controversy. "The White House shadows are mystifying the Washington Daniels," said the New York *Herald*, "and none there is to interpret the handwriting on the circular wall."

The silhouettes first appeared at the time the state of health of the President's mother became such as to

cause national concern. The shadows assumed the form of a hand with a pointed finger, and they appeared upon the central pillar on the east side of the White House portico. On several occasions the phenomenon was reported on the central pillar at the west side, but these appearances were infrequent. They came at different hours of the day and were visible for periods ranging from a few minutes to several hours.

At first it was believed that the shadows were cast by a cornice of the building, but repeated observations seemingly failed to support this view. The very appearance of these sharply-outlined dark images upon the snow-white marble pillars was startling. When, in addition, they failed to move with the sun, appeared and vanished with a total disregard for surrounding conditions, and later assumed distinct profiles that were easily identified, the effect upon the witnesses was one of bewildered apprehension.

At this time the shadows became known as "The Pointing Finger." Various interpretations were offered by White House attachés. Meanwhile the condition of Mother McKinley, as she was affectionately known to the nation,

became more critical. As a result, most of the more serious observers decided that the "hand" was a portent of her passing.

This was apparently confirmed when word of Mother McKinley's death was received. A contemporary account tells the story as follows:

"When a guard who received the first sad telegram from Canton, Ohio, had ushered the messenger up the stairway, he leaned for a moment in the embrasure of the hall window. Casting his eyes upward, he observed a strange shadow outlined sharply on a white column of the stately entrance. Plainly silhouetted, as by an artist's brush, was the form of an elderly woman, the profile turned toward the White House doorway.

"The strangely marked features at first suggested President McKinley, but every moment the figure took on more feminine guise. As the guard watched it, the shadow, growing more feminine every instant, turned slowly away, as if looking back over its shoulder, and disappeared. It has lasted during twenty-five minutes.

"Nothing more suggestive of the gentle woman who had passed away could be imagined—a visitant born of sun-

light and sentiment shadowing the snowy columns in weirdly tender guise—a spirit of watchful mother love and yearning farewell." So the guard described it.

Now the hand with its pointing finger faded away, and in the following months new forms appeared. First, there was the shape of an old woman seated at a spinning wheel. This shadowgraph was to occasionally reappear, defying analysis, until the phenomenon reached its climax. Perhaps it was symbolic of the passing of time, with its threads of life weaving a pattern that heralded the end of an era.

But there was no doubt about the identification of the shadow which next took shape. It was a profile of the head of John Sherman, senator and former candidate for president. It was Sherman, a veteran wheel horse in the wars of state, who introduced the Sherman silver and anti-trust laws, and who was Secretary of the Treasury during the Hayes administration.

Soon after his silhouette appeared—on Oct. 22, 1900—Senator Sherman died. In fact, for several months after his death the image remained, and White House attachés and

visitors came to regard it as a permanency. Then one day it vanished, never to return.

Now came the manifestation that caused a short-lived controversy. The silhouette appeared—vivid and distinct—of President McKinley. This was shortly before the presidential election of 1900, and the interpretations varied according to the temperament of the observers. Some predicted the defeat—at least—of the president, while others regarded it as a favorable omen.

The victory of the president caused the shadows to be regarded in a new light. Apparently not all meant fatality. Perhaps they were as uncertain of significance as they were of appearance during the day. At least they could imply success as well as doom for those they resembled.

However, the next tracery consisted of the familiar lines and curves of the ruler of England. It was the profile of Queen Victoria, whose long reign named a period in history. Those who believed the shadows foretold death were not surprised when word came of the serious illness of the Queen. She died early in 1901.

In the summer of 1901 the image of President McKinley

returned. It was, according to a reporter at the time, "clear, convincing and firm, as though the original, in his exit from the conference chamber, had paused and leaned his cheek against the receptive pillar, there to be indelibly etched by some magic artist."

And with it came another—the outlined shadow of Senator Marcus A. Hanna. It was Senator Hanna who, in 1896, had brought about the nomination of McKinley for president and conducted his campaign as chairman of the Republican National Committee. He had been elected a senator from Ohio a year later.

Watchers of the shadows remembered that the previous appearance of the president's profile had apparently been a sign of his success. And Senator Hanna was being referred to as a presidential possibility. Was the appearance of Senator Hanna on this round, mystic curtain a portent or a promise? And what was implied in the reappearance of President McKinley?

Time supplied the answers as the weeks now hurried to the end. In September, 1901, President McKinley went to

Buffalo, N. Y., to attend the Pan - American Exposition. While he was shaking hands with a number of visitors, an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz approached with his hand wrapped in a handkerchief that concealed a pistol. The assassin fired twice, both bullets striking the president. He died eight days later.

Senator Hanna lived for slightly over two years following the assassination. He was reelected senator in Ohio, but died in February, 1904, before he could take his seat. Under the new president—Theodore

Roosevelt—an aggressive era began that included the building of the Panama Canal, the irrigation of western lands, and the settlement of the Alaska Boundary dispute.

With the death of President McKinley, the strange silhouettes vanished. Across the white marble of the pillars only the normal shadows cast by parts of the building and trees passed in the sunlight. The weird images that apparently foretold five deaths joined its subjects in the annals of history. Only memory remained.

THE END



HOW ABOUT IT

How about the new FANTASTIC? Like it... hate it... so-so? Want more of this... less of that? Well, now is your chance to have your opinions heard.

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-
1. Do you personally want more, less or about the same emphasis given to the following types of fiction? (Please check.)

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Editorial	_____	_____	_____
Cartoons	_____	_____	_____
Letters	_____	_____	_____

ACCORDING TO YOU . .

(Continued from page 7)

lantine, 1958). In this short novel, popular s-f writer Blish introduces as his hero a Jesuit scientist, which is almost a contradiction in terms, who proceeds to expound, as "science," obsolete metaphysical rubbish which is not objected to by any of Blish's other characters. Blish's Jesuit "scientist" also expounds the "special creation" myth, seriously proposes the Manichaeian theory (or doctrine) of good and evil supernatural "creators" (which Blish admits is regarded as heretical by the Vatican) and resurrects Philip Goose's wholly unparsimonious and absurd theory that Earth was "created" in 4004 B.C. with all the paleontological and geological evidence for geological and biological evolution having been "planted" either by "God" or "Satan" to confuse and/or "test the faith" of us poor mortals. This theme is carried through the novel.

As this case is by no means unique in contemporary science fiction, I should like to go on record, as an s-f fan, writer and graduate student (Sociology) as being wholly opposed to such a pseudoscientific or antiscientific trend. Pure fantasy, of course, is a branch of literature in its own right, but science fiction and fantasy are worlds apart and should be kept apart. The scientific outlook has a difficult enough "row to hoe" today without being undermined by metaphysical pseudoscience and antiscience. Let us underscore the "science" in science fiction. Mixing science and superstition has already caused enough trouble on our battered planet without s-f writers and magazines causing more.

Edd Doerr
Calle 43 No. 8-64
Bogota, Colombia

● *We have a suspicion that science fiction is boxed in between two general directives. (1) Get out of the rut—be original—fresh—entertaining, (2) Watch it, bub. Stick to the old ideas because where can you find a new idea that's been around as long as an old one? This makes it rough, Mr. Doerr. But then again—where can you find an easy job that's as much fun as a hard one?*

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on another superb issue of *Fantastic*. "Patented Paradise" was tops and "The Girl Who Played Wolf" wasn't far behind it in quality. Finlay's art work was excellent, very reminiscent of the work he used to do in *Weird Tales*—real eerie.

Robert Siders
Chicago, Ill.

● *Think we'll start calling Him Finlay the Infallible.*

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MARTIN LINCOLN
FANTASTIC
One Park Avenue
New York 16, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

I greatly admired the cover on the last issue of *Fantastic*. In fact I thought that it was the best one I had ever seen on either *Amazing* or *Fantastic*. I mean the August issue with abominable monster. It ranks with the best of any science fiction covers to date.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

● *How did you like the September cover? It should certainly get Ed Valigursky the job as official portrait painter for the Ghoul family.*

Dear Editor:

Comments on the August *Fantastic*: As soon as I walked into the magazine store I spotted the cover. I think it is the best ever displayed on your fine magazine.

The stories were all good with the exception of "Magic Window" which, in my opinion, was only fair. The fact articles were also good.

ACCORDING TO YOU...

In reference to the letter column: "The Snake Pit" and "The Cheat" were not fantasy, they were however, good stories.

Ted Pauls
1448 Meridene Dr.
Baltimore 12, Md.

● *Guess we'll never live down the disgrace of publishing "Snake Pit." Even our publisher, Mike Michaelson, voted with the opposition on that one.*

Dear Ed:

Catching up on my s-f, I have eagerly devoured the February, March, April and May issues of the "new" *Fantastic*. I just don't understand readers like Jack Jones, Peter F. Skeberdis, Jim Gilliland, etc., who criticize your new trend. So what is wrong with fantasy fiction? It takes people of imagination, sensitivity and intelligence to appreciate it, maybe, but surely there are enough of these to support *Fantastic*. I have abandoned a few s-f magazines because all they offered was very muscular space opera.

Every story in the issues mentioned has been absorbing, enjoyable and well-written. In the May issue: "Snake Pit" gave me the



shivers and "Spawn of the Dark One" was terrifying (and all too true). But both are fine literature.

Alice Dooley
739 Newton Place, N.W.
Washington 10, D.C.

● *Now 'fess up, Alice. If Jack and Pete and Jim quit writing, you'd miss them, wouldn't you? We would too.*

Dear Editor:

After reading a back issue of *Fantastic* I was deeply moved and completely held by your authors' work. Since coming upon this magazine I have found a new and relaxing pastime which I had not known before. My interest and enthusiasm has grown so fast and so strong that I can hardly wait until a new issue arrives on the newsstand. My criticisms are all in your favor.

Fred J. Stephens
939 Cedar Pl.
Costa Mesa, Calif.

● *Thanks, Fred—but what back issue did you read? We'd like to know so we can send each of the authors a huge Christmas bonus. Well, anyhow a nice card.*



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ATOMIC Theory and chemistry enthusiast interested in hearing from pen pals. Has brown hair and brown eyes. Likes football, ham radio, boxing. Jerry Johnson, Esq., 118 N. 54th St. Milcitty, Mont.

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